

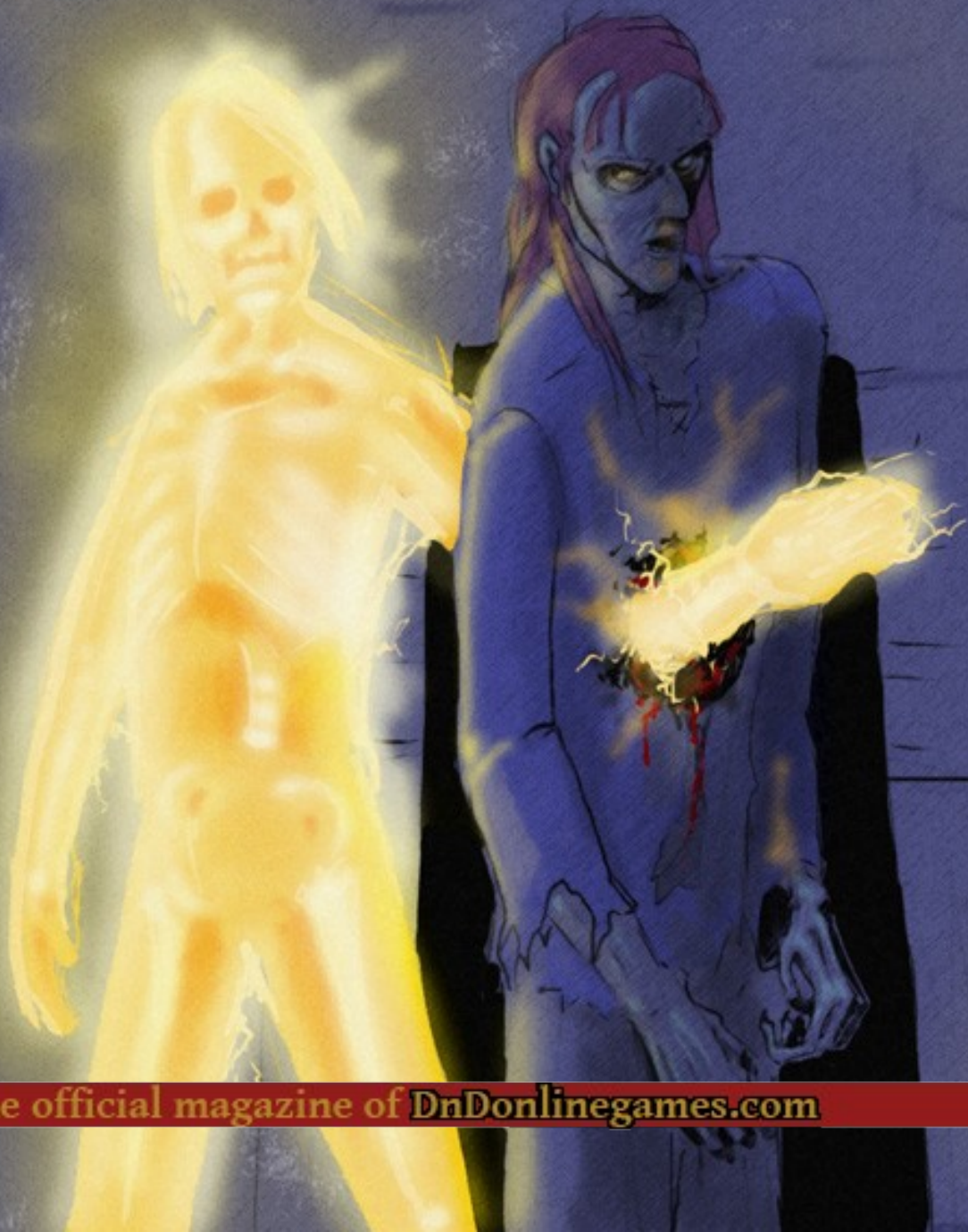


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Editor-in-Chief – RonarsCorruption
Assistant Editors – JJ_Wolven, Grogg Tree
Chief Copy Editor – Nimlos

A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome back dear readers,

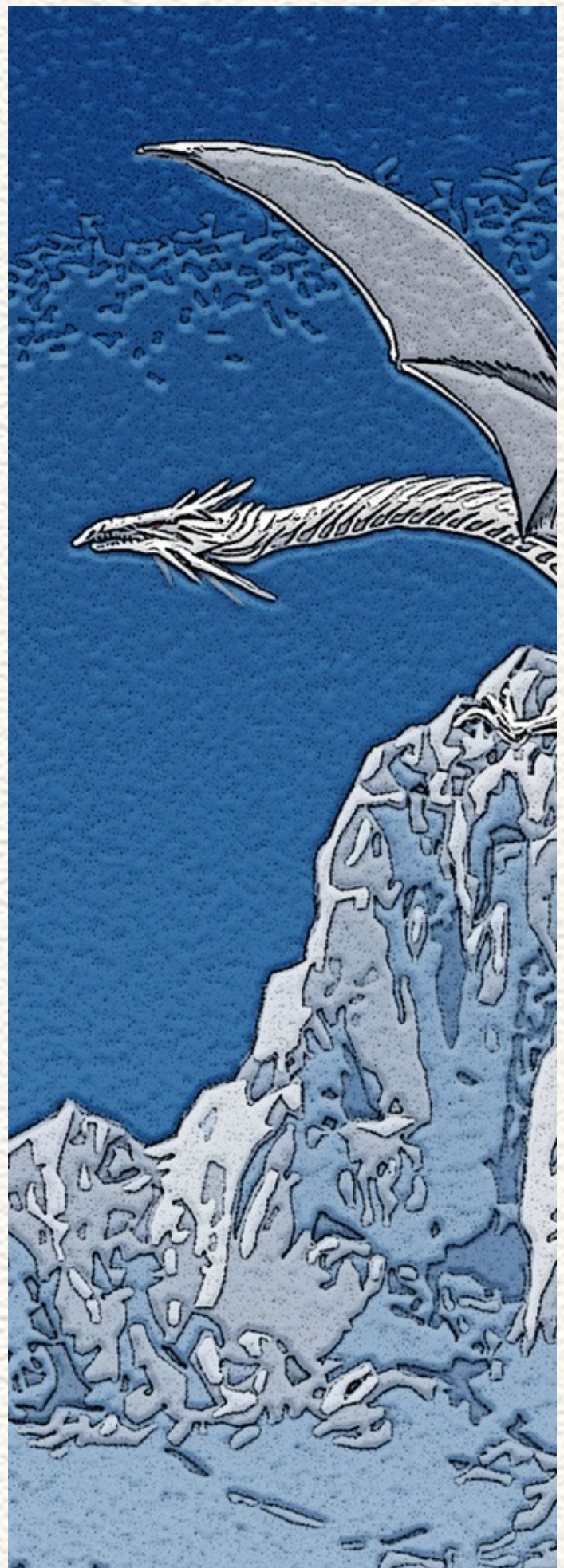
The last few months have been relatively calm on the site as everyone focused on their real lives, holidays and families. We at Explosive Runes hope that you're starting your year off well.

As the year drew to a close, so did the 2010 Iron DM competition here at DnDOnlineGames - sixteen competitors battled head to head to see who could create the greatest adventures with a set of totally random ingredients. The DM who rose supreme: idilippy, and keep an eye out for an interview in the next issue!

Not only that, but Episodic Adventures is taking some time to showcase some of the fantastic adventures written for the Iron DM competition, starting in this issue with The Pit and the Periculum by Ethics and myself.

The Explosive Runes Staff has been changing too, people are moving up in the world. JJ_Wolven, the creator of the popular Book of DOOM and DnDoG Sourcebook projects has risen to the rank of Assistant Editor, and Nimlos is now officially the lead Copy editor. But promotions tend to leave a few empty seats. If you're interested in writing for or working with Explosive Runes, drop me a line, I'd be glad to connect with you.

Game on,
RonarsCorruption



Tanlinn Blazebeard - Gentleman Adventurer!

By Evil/Insane_Genius

Chapter One

Insects buzzing filled the air. The soft splash of water being disturbed as an unknown beast slid beneath the surface. Trees creaking as gentle breezes move the branches together. These sounds were all familiar to Tanlinn Blazebeard as he moved through the swamp. The dwarf stood a stout four feet tall, with bright, flaming red hair sticking out in wisps from under his hat. His beard was tightly braided into intricate knots, and his nose was a bulbous circle atop it. His clothing was simple and efficient. His pants were made of a sturdy hemp, his knee high leather boots thick and sturdy. Glittering chain mail peeked out from under a shirt covered with a multitude of pockets. The leather belt he wore also was covered in pouches and bags, along with a case for crossbow bolts and a shortsword. Across his back as slung a crossbow and a large pack that seemed almost overloaded with gear.

He paused in his slogging through the swamp and pulled out a small compass. Wiping condensation off of the lens, he set it down on a tree stump and pulled a map out of his bag. He looked at the compass, looked to the map and looked back to the compass before putting the map and compass away and continuing to trudge. "Swamps," he muttered to himself under his breath. "Always in a gods-forsaken swamp." Thinking back, he sorely regretted having the conversation that brought him to this particular swamp.

Back at the Dwarven capital of Duisberg, he had been drinking with a friend of his, Gimble Gemhoarder. The gnome was a magician and inventor of sorts, and was convinced he had found a job not even Tanlinn could complete. For years, the two had a friendly competition where Gimble found rare artifacts and Tanlinn would go find them. So far, Tanlinn had a perfect record. Not that it had been easy, but he had found every item of curiosity Gimble had brought to light.

"This time though...this time is different!" the gnome said with excitement. Pulling a large tome out of his bag, he opened it to a page showing a giant temple. Various large creatures with one eye were standing on the steps.

"So you found a picture of the ancient Cyclopean kingdom." Tanlinn said with a shrug. "We already know where that is, the swamps to the east."

Gimble grinned and turned the page. The picture showed a funeral ceremony of a Cyclops noble being placed into a crypt with mounds of treasure and a large gem the size of Tanlinn's fist hanging on his neck.

Tanlinn's eyes widened at the view of the gem and a large smile creased his face. "Now that is something worth finding!" he exclaimed before taking a large drink from his mug of ale.

Gimble laughed and nodded his head. "I knew you would like it, old friend. So, think you can find it?"

Tanlinn's smile dropped as he looked thoughtfully at the picture. The gem was tempting, but finding one random crypt to one cyclops noble would not be an easy task. Gimble, seeing him hesitate, rummaged through his pack and pulled out a map case. "There is a map I found with the book. It shows the city the tomb was in." He rolled the case across the table; it came to a gentle stop at Tanlinn's hands.

"That blasted gnome! That blasted gem! I'll kill him when I bring this one back," Tanlinn muttered as he ducked to avoid a low branch. A large lizard sunning on a nearby rock hissed at him as he walked by. Tanlinn hissed back. The path he was following to find the tomb had for the last mile or so had been nothing but mud and filthy water. Finally, he spotted a strip of land raised up from the waterline. With a cry of joy, he clambered on top and sat down on a stump. Looking around, Tanlinn scratched his head. "This should be close. According to my maps it should be around here somewhere."

Looking around the sodden landscape, Tanlinn felt discouraged. It had already been a week of searching with no success. However, looking off to his left, he saw some old bricks set into the earth. 'An old road! What luck!' the dwarf thought as he followed it through the trees. Soon, the bricks led to a large door that was sunk into the side of a small mound. Excitement building inside, the dwarf let out a restrained shout of triumph. He had found the tomb!



Finding the tomb was one thing; entering it was a whole other matter. With practiced care, Tanlinn approached the tomb door. He set his pack down and reached into his belt pocket. Pulling out a small bundle, he rolled it out next to the door and began searching. The door itself was amazing. Carved into it was artwork that dated thousands of years back. While nothing in the carvings indicated a specific personage, Tanlinn felt confident he had found his tomb. Gently probing the door with his tools, he slowly searched for any pressure plates or hidden hinges that would cause a trap to trigger.

His patience paid off, as his probe gently depressed and revealed a plate set into the floor. While opening the door wouldn't set off the trap, stepping onto the plate would. Carefully, he opened the door. Stone rumbled and groaned in protest to being opened after such a long time of neglect. As the door moved off of the pressure plate, it quietly rose up out of the ground. The trap was now set, if someone stepped on the plate the trap would go off. What would happen then...well, Tanlinn didn't really want to know.

Looking at the door frame, he saw there was a small trigger that depressed when the door was shut. With a smug grin, Tanlinn pressed the trigger down and jammed it shut. With no small amount of satisfaction, he saw the plate sink back into the ground. 'Simple and easy,' he thought as he began putting his tools away. Once he finished, he shouldered his pack again and headed down into the crypt. Thankfully, once he descended deep enough his dark vision enabled him to see without using a torch. Very useful when you want to keep a low profile in a tomb.

The steps from the entrance led down into a broad hallway. Tapestries hung from the ceiling, depicting heroic scenes from what

Tanlinn could only assume was the Cyclops life. Featured prominently in most of those was the gem necklace. Tanlinn grinned and looked at the hallway. Four doors, two on each side, flanked the hallway and one large door sat at the end. Tanlinn cautiously approached, keeping an eye out for any more traps or dangers. Seeing nothing, he moved over to the first door on the left and opened it.

Inside, he saw rows of slaves lying mummified upon stone slabs. Grimacing, he closed the door and moved over to the other on the right hand side. Inside was a similar scene, more mummified slaves. His previous bad mood was returning, as inside each of the side rooms, his searches revealed nothing more then mummified slaves and servants. No gold, no treasures...nothing of value at all!

'Well, there is still the main room,' he thought with some optimism as he approached the main door. Carved into it was various hieroglyphs of the ancient Cyclopean language and frightening demon faces. Taking out his notebook, he transcribed the hieroglyphs and translated them roughly to say, "Beware intruder, or you shall join in the eternal service of Grom'shak the Mighty." Chuckling at the dire warning, he checked the door carefully for any traps.

Not finding anything, he opened the door. The low growl of the stone door scraping on the floor was the only thing to break the silence as he peered into the room. A perfectly preserved corpse lay on a ornately carved stone slab. Tanlinn marveled at the size of the creature. Easily it was twelve feet tall, and wide as two men. It was dressed in robes of nobility and around its neck was the gem Tanlinn had come in search of. Looking around the room, there was also sundry items lying about. A carved dire tiger, the skull of a dragon, a set of dice made from bone, a suit of full plate armor and an ornate great-sword: these all decorated the walls of the room.

His frustration at the lack of gold or loose gems was lessened somewhat by the thought of the gem at the throat of the dead Cyclops. He quietly approached the head of the corpse and reached out for the necklace. Swiftly, he pulled out his dagger and sliced the leather cord as he pulled the gem pendant to him. Chuckling to himself and pleased with his acquisition, he placed it into his bag and began to move to the door.

Just as he was about to open it, however, he heard movement behind him. Turning around, he saw the great eye in the middle of the cyclops' head open and staring at him. With a burning glow, the eye focused on the dwarf and let out a bellow of rage and anger, the air around him crackling with frost as an unnatural cold began to spread through the room. Tanlinn's heart stopped in fear as the undead monster sat up and began to move toward him.

Chapter Three

With a horrifying lurch, the Cyclops moved its bulk off of the slab and towards Tanlinn, who gave a hoarse cry of terror, scurried out the door and slammed it shut. A wet, solid pounding began on the door almost as soon as Tanlinn leaned against it to keep it shut. His eyes darted about the hallway, desperately searching for something to wedge the door closed. Nothing was visible and Tanlinn was about to start running for the entrance when he heard a sound that chilled him to the bone. A long, loud bellow raged out of the undead Cyclops and was answered by a multitude of other voices in the adjoining rooms.

The air was swiftly becoming too cold to bear for Tanlinn. Frost was forming in his beard, and wisps of fog were floating on the ground from the sudden temperature change. His breath billowed in clouds before him as he tried to come up with a way to keep the door shut. Reaching into his pockets, he cried out in relief as he pulled

free a small crowbar. Jamming it between the door and the floor, he took a few steps back.

The Cyclops pounded on the door. It rattled and scraped forward an inch, but the wedge held the door shut. The attack on the door continued with renewed vigor though, and Tanlinn could hear the side doors creaking open as the slaves and servants shambled forward on cloth-wrapped legs. Tanlinn knew he had only a short time to make it to the entrance and safety, so he ran for it as fast as he could. With screams of rage, the undead monsters stretched their hands out for him, eyes glowing with hatred and dark energy.

Just as Tanlinn reached the bottom of the steps, he heard a shuddering crash as the Cyclops burst through the stone doors. Bellowing in hatred, it took lumbering steps forward. Its arms swung before it, sweeping its minions out of the way as it moved towards him in a rapidly accelerating gait. Tanlinn took off up the stairs, panting for air as he reached the entrance. The heat of the day consumed him, causing his body to burn after the extreme cold of the tomb.

In a panic, Tanlinn could hear the monster moving up the stairs as rumbling footsteps drew nearer. Turning, he grabbed the door and tried to close it. It moved slightly, then was stopped by the jam he had placed in the trap mechanism. Tearing the jam out of the door, Tanlinn felt the ground beneath him rise and snap back down. The trap! He had forgotten about it and was standing on the plate as the trigger was released. The doorway shook now with a more ominous force and Tanlinn was able to dive out of the way as the ceiling collapsed down the passageway. With a last barely audible roar, the undead horrors were crushed in the entrance stairway.

Lying on the ground, panting from his flight; Tanlinn let his head fall to the ground as he barked out hoarse laughter. Gasping for air, he lifted the gem above his head and smiled as he watched the sunlight play over the facets in the precious stone. Sitting up, he wrapped it in a cloth and placed it deep within his pack. It was time to leave this swamp and go home.

It was with no small ceremony and flourish that Tanlinn presented the gem to Gimble. The gnome's eyes widened and his mouth dropped at the sight of such a priceless treasure.

"You son of an orc! You really got it?" Gimble swore in awe as he took the gem out of the cloth and held it up to the light.

Tanlinn snatched it out of the gnomes hands and wrapped it quickly back into the cloth. With a snort he said, "Damn right I did. I'm the best damn explorer and treasure hunter this world has ever seen. I'd like to see anyone else do what I did and survive!"

Gimble nodded and said, "It seems you win again, Tanlinn. You are either the luckiest or bravest dwarf I've ever known." With a grin, the gnome pulled an ancient-looking leather book out of his bag and said, "But this time! This time, I've got one that is going to stump you for sure!"

Tanlinn just laughed as Gimble opened the book.



Perchance to Dream

By Codger

Whether as a result of ongoing rain or a desert wind, the crumbling of dried mud or the burn spot where lightning struck, the suddenly revealed little chip of alabaster catches the eye. There is something vaguely familiar about its shape. Upon closer inspection, it bears tiny ridges eerily similar to the whorls of any fingertip's skin. Recognizing that much is simple. The rest, as they say, is another matter.

The Tip of a Dream

The tale of the Dream Tip, as some call it, is as old as the hills. Yet it is rarely told, as to this day there are those actively discouraging its retelling. In all fairness, their concerns are not entirely lacking merit.

It began with a diviner of vaguely modest renown who called himself Zerndoth. How he stumbled upon the discovery may never be fully known, but at some point he flew past a magical gate. That the gate was completely invisible where it hung in midair is beyond question, as the entire area has been searched uncountable times. Some claim that it was a unique aspect of Zerndoth that allowed him to notice the gate's presence, and perhaps they have the right of it. In any case, the diviner quickly began his study of the unusual gate. Which was exactly when The Disturbance began.

Wherever darkness reigned and people slept, at the time of Zerndoth's scrutiny of the magical gate, their dreams were noticeably impacted. They woke with a sense of loss, thousands of them each night. Most described it as knowing they had a

dream and that the memory of it was somehow taken from them before waking. The vast majority of these victims found the experience to be very disturbing, hence the moniker.

It took all of five nights for the connection between Zerndoth's studying and The Disturbance to be made, which brought a temporary respite from the growing nightly pandemic. In a perfect world, that would have been the end of it. Zerndoth though, had perceived something (or someone?) beyond that gate which he simply could not live without. Despite promising to permanently seal the gate, he instead prepared to use it. To his credit, he did spend considerable time and resources creating what he thought would provide suitable shielding around the gate. Only then did he activate the gate's inherent magic and call forth his dream.

Unfortunately the worthy attempt at shielding was an utter failure. People realized the diviner's treachery almost at once, of course, and powerful mages immediately tracked down Zerndoth and forcibly sealed the gate. Zerndoth instantly went quite mad, babbling ceaselessly for the rest of his days that his angel had just been coming through the gate when it was sealed, and that a tiny portion had actually made it through. To say that the resulting search was extensive would be a gross understatement. Yet nothing was ever found. Between bouts of drooling, Zerndoth further claimed that the gate merely shifted position instead of being sealed, and that only the speck of his angel that made it through could locate the gate again.

Madmen say the craziest things.

The Pit and the Periculum

By Ethics and RonarsCorruption

The Iron DM competition is a popular scene at DnDOnlineGames, for the adventures it produces and the fanfare all about it. However, the adventures as they're written aren't entirely complete. No stat blocks, no skill Dcs, nothing. Enter Iron Adventures.

Over the next several issues of Explosive Runes, I'm going to be polishing up and fleshing out some of my favourite adventures from Iron DM into full, playable adventures for you, dear readers. Enjoy!

In this adventure, the PCs have been hired by a brass dragon to retrieve a treasure previously belonging to the Cut-Lasses'- Satman's Sphinx. The last surviving member of the Cut-Lasses has passed away only recently, and the dragon wishes to claim the object for her collection. The PCs must descend into "The Pit," where the spirits of the Cut-Lasses still linger to protect their treasure.

The Cut-Lasses were a brutal gang of female pirates that once terrorized the open seas. Their captain was "Bloody Morgan," a cunning woman who led her band to many successes in life. The gang has long since retired, its last aging member watching over her companion's final resting place.

Satman's Sphinx is a seemingly mundane object, a small sphinx crafted of dark onyx with tiny emeralds for eyes. It is a treasure of little value to most, except to those who know of its creator, Satman, a little-known sculptor who died centuries ago, leaving only a few of his works on the mortal coil. To

most, the sphinx is worth only as much as its eyes, but to the wisest and most seasoned of collectors, it is a valuable piece.

Intro: Dragons Den

The adventure begins outside the cave of the brass dragon Aedandri, who has summoned the party there to proposition them with a job. When they enter her cave, they find Aedandri as well as an equally large blue dragon sitting opposite a board a dozen feet wide, on which are set about fifty fist-sized pieces. If questioned, Aedandri will explain they are playing dragon's chess to settle who claims hunting rights to Chapell Ridge north of her cave. The game typically takes about a month, and it's already a week in when she got the news and sent for the PCs. Leaving now would be mean forfeiture.

The task the PCs have been called to help with is the retrieval of Satman's Sphinx, a treasure of a group of pirates - the last member of whom passed away recently in the town of Faircoast, not far from here. Aedandri will continue to pay more attention to the game than the PCs, and Diplomacy checks are required for any additional information, all checks are DC20, and her mood cannot be improved. Two failures will have Aedandri insisting the PCs 'get on with it'. She knows where the town is, that the group was called the Cut-Lasses, that the treasure is hidden underground, though when asked about the Sphinx itself, Aedandri is very curt, stating that "No human could possibly understand things that aren't valued in gold." See below for additional information that can be revealed.

If she has already revealed information about the pirate gang, she will add they never understood it either. Aedandri promises to reward the PCs handsomely for their help, with objects that will hold more value to them than the Sphinx.

Upon acceptance, she will send them on their way with the following warning, "Farewell humans! If you have not returned in a fortnight, I will assume you dead. And if you are not... pray I do not find out."

Diplomacy Checks vs Aedandri

- * The Sphinx had last fallen into the hands of a band of pirates well known among the coastal towns.

- * These pirates were known as the Cut-Lasses, a ruthless all female gang that disappeared into retirement. Their last living member watched over their treasure.

- * The pirates constructed an elaborate defense for their treasure, some say they ensured they would be able to protect it even after death.

- * Part of the defence for the pirates treasure was to be a bottomless pit. Aedandri is unsure if they ever completed this particular defence.

Chapter 1: Faircoast

Two days' travel outland from Aedandri's cave, the PCs find themselves in the modest village of Faircoast. The town is raised above the coast line on a cliff about 40' high, and the smell of salt and the sea air is strong here. The cliffs continue to rise to the village's north, though the paths leading upwards are disused and generally ignored. Several paths stretch down to the beach from the city, though beyond the city's docks and a few small warehouses there is nothing of particular interest.

While searching for the sphinx, the PCs will find none of the townsfolk know anything about it - not even rumors. However, asking about the Cut-Lasses, recent deaths, unusual townsfolk, or rolling a general Gather Information check DC15 will reveal to the PCs the only death in town recently has been the disappearance of elderly and supposedly retired pirate, Ibella Tolasse, a hermit who lived further up in the cliffs. She

has not visited for her usual weekly supply run in two weeks - so they can only assume she has passed on.

Ascending the rough cliff face is not terribly difficult, each PC should be made to roll one DC10 climb check, with failure dealing 1d6 falling damage, but have no serious consequences. When the PCs reach the top of the cliffs, they will be able to see Ibella's cabin. It is nothing more than a small, three roomed affair, hardly befitting a retired pirate. Just behind the cabin lies "The Pit," a 10' wide circle that extends down beyond the limits of sight, and is marked with a battered sign reading "Warning! Bottomless!" Closer examination of the pit reveals it is not in fact bottomless, but simply has a basic Silent Image spell keeping it looking as such. Disbelieving the illusion is a DC14 will save, and reveals that the smooth stone walls only extend 80' down. The PCs can attempt to scale their way down, with an unaided climb DC25, or search Ibella's home for answers. Examining the nearby area will cause the PCs to find signs of regular movement towards the edge of the pit, but no explanation for such.

Upon entering Ibella's home, they will be greeted with the strong smell of decay, as in the bedroom the PCs will find Ibella herself, the last of the Cut-Lasses, passed away approximately a week ago. While searching the kitchen and front room reveals nothing, a DC20 Search check will reveal a strange lever in Ibella's closet, built into the back wall. If pulled, nothing visibly happens, but when twisted, a horrible grinding noise can be heard coming from the pit. This lever has caused sturdy pegs to protrude from the pit walls, making for an easy descent for medium humanoids (Climb DC5). Searching Ibella herself will bring attention to a small lump beneath Ibella's blouse - a plain silver key.

The Pit is comprised of three levels, each a circular labyrinth that winds inwards. The end of each maze provides passage to the level below. Members of the Cut-Lasses have been entombed into the outer walls of each level, so their spirits will continue to protect their treasures for all eternity.

The first level is built entirely from stone, and the tombs are in the corners of each room. Areas within 10 feet of a corner are filled with bright light, leaving the central area of each room shadowy. There are no areas of complete darkness.

The second level is less finished, mostly stone, but the outermost walls are earthen. The tombs are less regular, only one per chamber, which causes more areas of shadow, and further than 30' from a flame to be complete darkness.

The third level features few ghosts, but they are the strongest of the three levels. There is very little stone work, and the oddly formed labyrinth is comprised of thick stalagmites and stalactites. The lighting is provided by glowing fungus on the walls or ceiling and alternates between 1d4 (average 2) 5' squares of darkness followed by 1d4 (average 3) 5' squares of shadow.

On each level, PCs can find remains of previous thieves and adventurers that once tried to steal from the Cut-Lasses. PCs can find small deposits of items that have not yet decayed or rusted out of use, as well as gold that the deceased had on them at the time. The first level of the pit is where the PCs will find the majority of the intruder's remains, they become few and far between and the lower two levels, especially the third.

Chapter 2: Into the Dark

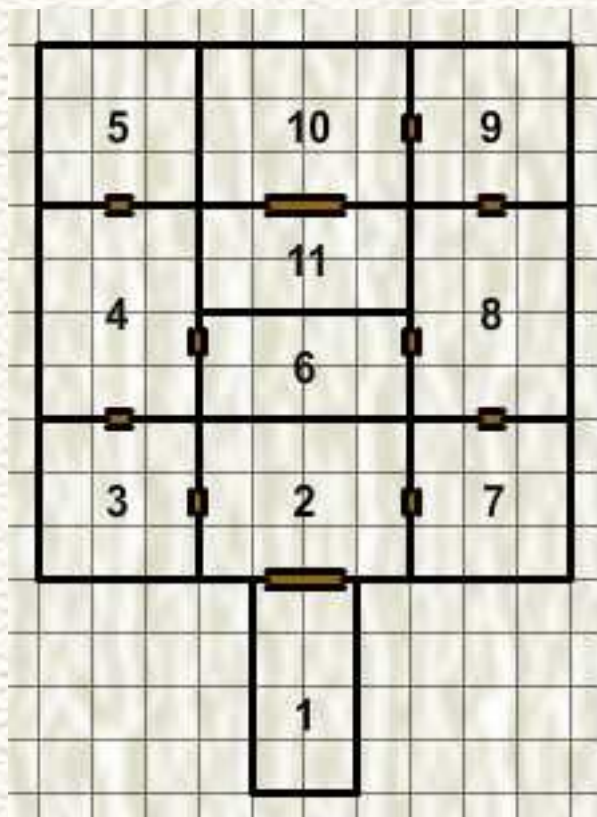
At the bottom of the pit, a Search check (DC15) will reveal a trapdoor in the dirt. The door can be opened with the key from Ibella's body, or forced open with a Strength check with a DC20. The trapdoor opens to reveal shadowy illumination below, with an unstable-looking ladder leading down into the darkness. The actual floor is 10ft below the bottom of the ladder (20 feet below the trapdoor), and the PCs will find it to be made not of dirt, but stone. The bottom half of the ladder has fallen further down the corridor, after having broken in the middle. It can be reattached and climbed as normal should the PCs need to leave.

At the bottom of the ladder, it seems to be a different world entirely. The pit has seemingly widened indefinitely, and the stone walls that surround you reach to the ceiling. A corridor stretches before you, curving slightly. And behind you there is only solid stone. The corners of the room blaze with unnatural blue flames, illuminating markings on the walls and it seems, for now, there is only one direction to travel.

Examining the markings and the flames reveals that the flames seem to be continual flames, cast on spherical sapphires embedded beneath simple diagrams of the Cut-Lass members entombed there. Removing or attempting to disenchant the sapphires causes them to each trigger a fire trap spell. The fire trap does 1d4+10 damage, half fire, half negative energy, and will destroy the sapphire and the flame cast on it. Successfully disabling the trap (DC29) before removing the gem reveals the gem is worth 50gp - but any failure activates the trap normally. There are four such gems in each zone, and 11 zones on the first level.

As the PCs explore the labyrinth, they will come across the spirits of some of the pirates that have passed away within. The first one they will encounter is alone, the others in two groups are in groups of two, and a group of three. All spirits on this level are Shadow of a Pirate, as seen below.

First Level



Room 1

The stale air seems to chill around you, the torches on the wall flickering ominously. Just within view is a poorly defined figure, slightly hunched, motionless. As you stare, it all at once seems filled with motion. It is unearthly, and the way it moves sends a chill down your spine in its strangeness. It glides smoothly towards you, although its limbs seem to twitch and jerk. Seeing its transparent form more clearly now, it becomes clear that this was once a woman, perhaps beautiful, but now she is gaunt in appearance, hallowed and ominous. Her mouth hangs open, a low groan echoing down the corridor, making your stomach drop. It is clear now, in this wordless moan, that she seeks your lives.

This room contains one Shadow of a Pirate.

Shadow of a Pirate

Shadow Warrior 2 (CR4 / 1200xp)

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8

---Defense---

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+2 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 31 (5d8+10)

Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +4

Defensive Abilities: incorporeal, channel resistance +2; undead traits

---Offense---

Speed fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee incorporeal touch +6 (1d6+2 Cold damage plus 1 Strength damage)

Special Attacks create spawn

Statistics: Str —, Dex 14, Con —, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 15

Base Atk +4; CMB +6; CMD 19

Feats Dodge, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Fly +11, Perception +8, Stealth +8 (+12 in dim light, +4 in bright light);

Create Spawn (Su) A humanoid creature killed by a shadow's Strength damage becomes a shadow under the control of its killer in 1d4 rounds.

Strength Damage (Su) A shadow's touch deals 1 point of Strength damage to a living creature. This is a negative energy effect. A creature dies if this Strength damage equals or exceeds its actual Strength score.

Room 2

A different sort of light breaks the pattern of flaming orbs, a steady white glow coming from something on the floor ahead. It is a grisly sight - a man here has infiltrated down into this hidden pit only to have slipped up and triggered a trap, ending his life. A softly glowing sword rests to one side of his corpse, which appears to have been impaled several times, once through the man's head.

This room contains a Spear Floor Trap.

If the PCs had difficulty fighting the incorporeal enemy in the previous room, reduce the treasure available in the pirate's trove on the fourth level by 6,000gp, and increase the sword here from a +1 longsword to a +1 ghost-touch longsword.

Spear Floor Trap CR 5 (1600xp)

Type mechanical; Perception DC 20; Disable Device DC 20

Trigger: one or more medium humanoids in the center of the chamber; Reset: crank hidden in wall (perception DC20 to locate)
Effect: Two Attacks each square +15 melee (1d6+6 / x3); multiple targets (all targets in center 10x10ft of chamber)

Room 3

This room contains hundreds of cubby holes. It takes eight hours for one character to search the entire room. Each additional character searching reduces the time to search by 2 hours, minimum 2 hours. Unfortunately, there is nothing within.

Room 4

This room contains three Shadow of a Pirates. (CR7 encounter)

Room 5

This room contains a Spear Floor Trap. (CR5 trap)

*1/2 of a CR6 encounter in treasure

Room 6

This room contains a Frost Fangs Trap.

*CR5 encounter treasure

Frost Fangs Trap CR 7 (3200xp)

Type mechanical; Perception DC 25; Disable Device DC 20

Trigger: two or more medium humanoids within the chamber; Duration: 3 rounds;

Reset: none

Effect: Jets of freezing water (3d6 cold damage, DC 20 Reflex save each round for half damage); multiple targets (all targets in chamber)

Room 7

This room contains two Shadow of a Pirates. (CR6 encounter)

*CR5 encounter treasure

Room 8

This room has an elaborate mural of a sailing ship on it's floor.

Room 9

*1/2 of a CR6 encounter in treasure

Room 10

This room contains two Shadow of a Pirates. (CR6 encounter)

*CR7 encounter treasure



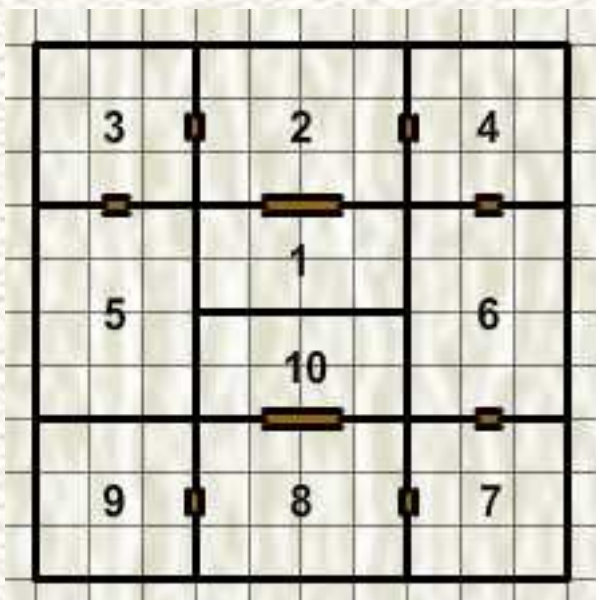
Room 11

This room contains a large locked set of doors in the floor. Instead of a normal lock, there is a set of eight levers set within the left side door, all resting upwards, and a small plaque beneath them. The plaque reads: *Call for the seventeen women on a dead man's chest, counted in pirate's twos.* A linguistics check DC20 reveals that Pirates Twos is a code used by pirates to count supplies, where each item from the left is counted as twice as much as the number before it. (In real world, this is binary) The solution is setting the switches to 17 in binary (10001000), with 1 representing up and 0 representing down. If the PCs fail to make the check, they can solve the problem by trying random combinations in approximately one hour.

Players receive 1,600xp upon solving the riddle. Doing so reveals a ladder down to the next floor of the dungeon.

Descending the ladder located below the panel reveals a similar, but distinctly different area than above. Each chamber is lit by one single flame, instead of one in each corner, and the murals featuring the pirates laid within are larger and more elaborate. The gems lighting them are identical to the floor above. All pirate tombs are on internal walls of this level, as the exterior walls are made of packed dirt.

Second Level



Room 1

The PCs enter into this room, and unlike other rooms on this floor, there are no flames or lights. There is an open section of the wall large enough for a body to be inserted. Should the PCs go and insert Ibella's corpse into the hole, the wall will seal over within 2 rounds, leaving a perfect, seamless wall identical to the other tombs. Doing so will grant the PCs 2,400exp, and increase the treasure to be found in the cove below by 2,000gp. (consider it a good karma bonus).

Room 2

This room's northern wall is halfway constructed out of heavy stone blocks. Approximately 200 stone bricks remain in the corners of this room, though nothing of value is amid them.

Room 3

Instead of a wall-set tomb, in this room there is a statue with the gem held in its hands. Unlike other gems, this gem can be taken freely, and acts normally like an everburning torch. If struck, however, it releases an explosion as the other gems.

Room 4

This room is freezing, and the reason is immediately clear. Two ghosts, more solid than those you have seen before, float silently in this room, their existence leeching so much heat out of the room the floor beneath them is covered in a thin layer of frost.

Two Cool Shade of a Pirate (CR7 encounter)

Room 5

There are several large tables against the walls of this room, and on them several large yellowed pages of parchment. Amid the dessicated drawings, there are maps of all three floors of the dungeon, as well as 'intended layout' sketches for the third level. With these in hand, the PCs are able to navigate the third floor of the labyrinth in 1d4 hours instead of the normal 3d6.

Cool Shade of a Pirate

Frigid Shadow Warrior 2 (CR5 / 1600xp)

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +8

---Defense---

AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+2 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)

hp 31 (5d8+10)

Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +4

Defensive Abilities: incorporeal, channel resistance +2; undead traits

---Offense---

Speed fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee incorporeal touch +6 (1d6+2 cold damage plus 2 Strength damage)

Special Attacks create spawn, freezing aura

Statistics: Str —, Dex 14, Con —, Int 6, Wis 12, Cha 15

Base Atk +4; CMB +6; CMD 19

Feats Dodge, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Fly +11, Perception +8, Stealth +8 (+12 in dim light, +4 in bright light);

Languages Common

Create Spawn (Su) A humanoid creature killed by a shadow's Strength damage becomes a shadow under the control of its killer in 1d4 rounds.

Strength Damage (Su) A shadow's touch deals 1d6 points of Strength damage to a living creature. This is a negative energy effect. A creature dies if this Strength damage equals or exceeds its actual Strength score.

Freezing Aura (Su) A Frigid creature leeches away the heat of all creatures nearby. Starting your turn in a square adjacent to a Frigid creature does 1d4 subdual cold damage the first round, 1d4 lethal cold damage for the second round, and 2d4 cold damage each round after. Leaving the aura reduces the damage taken within the aura by one step per full round spent outside, though no damage is taken while not within the aura itself. (example: a creature that had spent 3 rounds in, then 2 rounds out of the aura, then re enters the aura is treated as if they had already spent one round in the aura). All auras created by Frigid creatures are treated as one contiguous aura.

Room 6

This room contains an Unholy Flame Strike Trap. The trap is located in the very center of the room, and effects all squares except the four corner spaces of the room.

Unholy Flame Strike Trap

CR 6 (2400xp)

Type magic; Perception DC 30; Disable Device DC 30

Trigger: two or more medium humanoids within the chamber; Reset: none

Effect: spell effect (Flame Strike, 6d6 half fire half negative energy damage, DC17 Reflex save for half damage);

Room 7

The trap built into the floor of this room has been partially disassembled already, and a frozen husk of a corpse lays collapsed within.

*CR 5 encounter treasure

Room 8

Three Cool Shade of a Pirate (CR8 encounter)

*CR 7 encounter treasure

Room 9

This room contains a Frost Fangs Trap. (CR7 trap)

Room 10

Similar to the level above, a heavy metal door sits on the floor here, awaiting the PCs to solve its riddle before continuing on. Set into the door there is a sliding puzzle. PCs may make a DC20 Intelligence check (not taking 20), or a DC30 Disable Device check to open the puzzle in a short amount of time. Otherwise, solving the puzzle takes six hours.

Solving the puzzle grants the PCs 1,600exp, and reveals the ladder to the next level.

Chapter 4: The Deepest and Darkest Levels

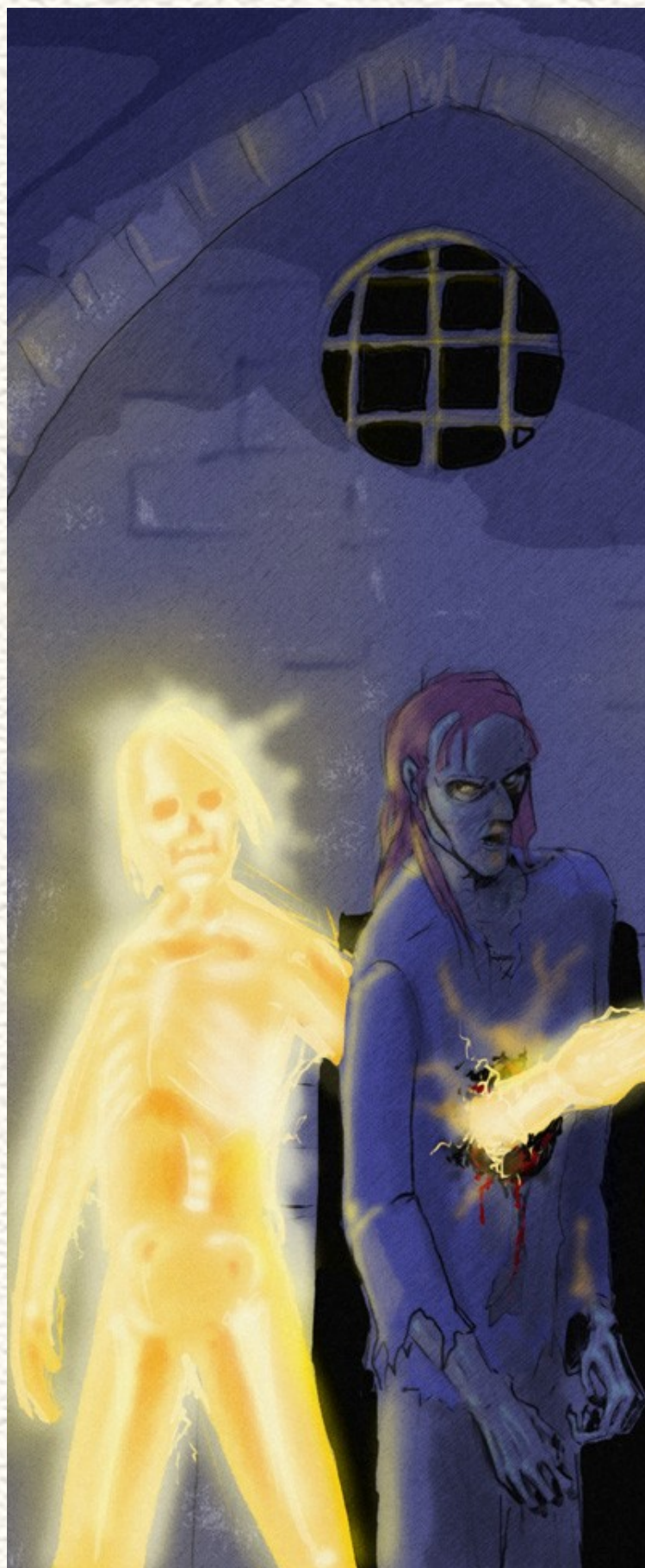
The third level is a much larger complex than the above two floors, and is made almost entirely of unworked natural stone and packed earth. However, there are marks of a worn path heading off into the tunnels, implying something is hidden beneath. There are no lights or obvious pirate tombs on this level, instead the area is lit by glowing moss.

Navigating this level without aid takes the PCs 3d6 hours. If they have the map from room 8 on the second floor, this time is reduced to 1d4 hours. If they use Survival to follow the worn trail, the time is reduced by half (minimum one hour).

After one hour, and every two hours beyond, roll on the following table for random encounters. Each encounter can happen exactly once; with duplicate rolls resulting in no encounter. Once all results have occurred, there are no more encounters.

- 1 - Ghost Gargoyle (CR6)
- 2 - two Cool Shade of a Pirate (CR7)
- 3 - Icy Shade of a Pirate (CR6)
- 4 - one Cool Shade of a Pirate, and one Icy Shade of a Pirate (CR7)

Finally, the PCs reach the descent to the next level. There is no puzzle to be solved here, only a faded final warning carved into the stone that blocks their passage downward (DC20 Strength check to move it). "Here lies Bloody Morgan, Captain of the Cut-Lasses. Do not enter her grave if you wish ever to emerge." Once they descend into the final level of the pit, the party finds themselves in the Cut-Lasses' cove.



Icy Shade of a Pirate

Advanced Frigid Shadow Warrior 2 (CR6 /

2400xp)

CE Medium undead (incorporeal)

Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +10

---Defense---

AC 17, touch 15, flat-footed 14 (+2 deflection, +2 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural)

hp 41 (5d8+20)

Fort +8, Ref +5, Will +6

Defensive Abilities: incorporeal, channel resistance +2; undead traits

---Offense---

Speed fly 40 ft. (good)

Melee incorporeal touch +8 (1d6+4 Cold damage plus 2 Strength damage)

Special Attacks create spawn, freezing aura

Statistics: Str —, Dex 18, Con —, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 19

Base Atk +4; CMB +8; CMD 21

Feats Dodge, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Fly +13, Perception +10, Stealth +10 (+14 in dim light, +6 in bright light);

Languages Common

Create Spawn (Su) A humanoid creature killed by a shadow's Strength damage becomes a shadow under the control of its killer in 1d4 rounds.

Strength Damage (Su) A shadow's touch deals 1d6 points of Strength damage to a living creature. This is a negative energy effect. A creature dies if this Strength damage equals or exceeds its actual Strength score.

Freezing Aura (Su) A Frigid creature leeches away the heat of all creatures nearby. Starting your turn in a square adjacent to a Frigid creature does 1d4 subdual cold damage the first round, 1d4 lethal cold damage for the second round, and 2d4 cold damage each round after. Leaving the aura reduces the damage taken within the aura by one step per full round spent outside, though no damage is taken while not within the aura itself. (example: a creature that had spent 3 rounds in, then 2 rounds out of the aura, then re enters the aura is treated as if they had already spent one round in the aura). All auras created by Frigid creatures are treated as one contiguous aura.

Ghost Gargoyle

CR6, XP 2,400

CE Medium undead (augmented monstrous humanoid, incorporeal)

Init +6; Senses darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +5

---Defense---

AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 10 (+2 Dex)

hp 15 (5d8-10)

Fort +4, Ref +6, Will +4

DR 10/magic, Channel resistance +4, incorporeal, undead traits, rejuvenation

---Offense---

Speed fly 60 ft. (perfect)

Melee Corrupting Touch +5 (6d6 save DC11 for half), or Corrupting gaze

Statistics: Str -, Dex 14, Con -, Int 6, Wis 11, Cha 11

Base Atk +5; CMB +5; CMD 17

Feats Hover, Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Fly)

Skills Fly +12, Perception +5, Stealth +11 (+17 in stony areas);

Languages Common, Terran

SQ freeze, Corrupting Gaze DC11

Treasure: Standard, rerolling perishables

Special Abilities

Freeze (Ex) A gargoyle can hold itself so still it appears to be a statue. A gargoyle that uses freeze can take 20 on its Stealth check to hide in plain sight as a stone statue.

Corrupting Gaze (Su): The ghost is disfigured through age or violence, and has a gaze attack with a range of 30 feet that causes 2d10 damage and 1d4 Charisma damage (Fortitude save negates Charisma damage but not physical damage).

Corrupting Touch (Su): All ghosts gain this incorporeal touch attack. By passing part of its incorporeal body through a foe's body as a standard action, the ghost inflicts a 6d6s of damage. This damage is not negative energy—it manifests in the form of physical wounds and aches from supernatural aging. Creatures immune to magical aging are immune to this damage, but otherwise the damage bypasses all forms of damage reduction. A Fortitude save halves the damage inflicted.

Chapter 5, Cut-lasses Cove

The pirate's cove is a small cave, with heaps of treasure piled against the walls and strewn about the floor so evenly it seems as if the gold coins are bottomless (closer examination reveals they are only about three coins deep). A figurehead of a pirate maiden is mounted above a pool of water in a far corner of the room, and the entire room is lit with a warm, yet flickering light from some invisible source. The PCs can spot a black sphinx statue not far from the pool of water, half-buried in the piles of gold.

If the PCs attempt to pick up any of the treasure, or approach the pool, the ghost of Bloody Morgan will rise from the figurehead, howling in hatred and greed. She collected this treasure, and she will keep it.

Once Bloody Morgan appears, two other Cool Shade of a Pirates descend from a ceiling one round later, and the room begins to heat up. Once Bloody Morgan is defeated, the two Cool Shades immediately disappear. The coins in this room are cursed pirate gold, and remaining near them will cause them to rapidly heat up to painfully hot temperatures. Standing in a square containing gold coins (originally all squares) causes the PCs to take 1d4 subdual heat damage on the first round, 1d4 lethal fire damage on the second round, and 2d4 fire damage each following round, at which point the coins appear to have burst into dark red flames. At this point, the square also does 1 fire damage to each creature in adjacent squares. All damage is considered from one continuous source, so fire resistance is only applied to this damage once. Exiting a square reduces the counter of that square by 1 point each round, to a point where the coins return to normal after three rounds. A character can clear a 5ft square of coins using a full round action so long as at least one adjacent square contains coins.

This heat is directly opposite the Cool Shade's Freezing Aura ability. Any space a Cool shade enters immediately returns to dealing no damage, and all adjacent squares are reduced by one step, and will not increase in step so long as the Cool Shade remains in an adjacent square. However, if a Cool Shade is force-moved into a burning square, they take damage as normal before the flames cease. Furthermore, if a character is taking heat damage from the floor, they do not take cold damage from the Cool Shade's Freezing Aura on the same round.

The curse on the coins in this room remains for 24 hours after Bloody Morgan's defeat (Spellcraft DC20 to identify this), and afterwards will return to being normal coins. The value of the treasure in the horde is 8,350gp (slow), 16,600(medium), or 25,800(fast). Roughly half the wealth in the room is in gold coins, and the remainder should be mostly magic items at the DM's discretion. In addition to the other treasure, the PCs will now be able to easily collect the sphinx, whose black body is easily visible amongst the gold.

A Search check with a DC20 will reveal an outline against one of the cave walls of the outline of a rectangle. When touched, a passage out of the cove will open up. It is a tunnel of about 80 feet that will seal behind them after one minute, at which point it must be opened again from the inside. The PCs will find themselves greeted by the salty air of Faircoast's beach, far below the cliff on which Ibella's home is built. Three days after Bloody Morgan's defeat, the lack of her energies will cause the entrance to the cave to collapse in on itself, effectively sealing it away forever. The resulting quake can be felt in town, though not much further.

The Wrap Up

Having escaped the Pit with the sphinx, the PCs now have two options. They can return with the sphinx to Aedandri, who will reward the players with magical items that she has deemed unfit for her collection. These items should be selected by the DM and have a value of approximately 5,000gp each, or rolled randomly from Minor Magic Items at DM's discretion. Returning the sphinx in this way will also provide the PCs with 3,600xp.

Should the PCs choose not to return the sphinx to Aedandri, they can instead attempt to sell it themselves. Appraisers will not be able to place an exact value, and give estimates anywhere from 5,000-50,000gp on its worth, though they will not be willing to purchase the item. There seems to be nothing magical about it, and Aedandri's earlier statement rings true: no one truly understands the value of the sphinx. Should the PCs actively pursue a buyer, after 2d4 weeks they will find a collector offering 30,000gp. Doing so will also provide the PCs with 2,400xp.

If the PCs continue adventuring and partake in any future tasks or adventures that would make their exploits well known, Aedandri will hear of them, and knowing that they still live will send others to pursue them. This element can be used to spawn future adventures, including an eventual reconciliation with, or battle against, Aedandri.



Bloody Morgan stats

CE Medium undead (augmented humanoid, incorporeal)
Rogue 5 Ghost
CR6, 2,400xp
Init +3; Senses darkvision 60ft; Perception +15

---Defense---

AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 13 (+3 dex, +3 deflection)
hp 47 (5d8+15)
Fort +1, Ref +7, Will +2
As Rogue: Trapfinding, trap sense +1, Evasion, Uncanny Dodge, Resiliency, channel resistance +4, darkvision 60 ft., incorporeal, undead traits.

---Offense---

Speed fly 30 ft. (perfect)
Melee Corrupting Touch +5 (6d6 save DC15 for half), or Malevolence
Statistics: Str -, Dex 17, Con -, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 17
Base Atk +3; CMB +3; CMD 16
Feats: Acrobatic, Blind Fight, Improved Unarmed Strike, Hover
Skills: Stealth +15, Perception +15, fly +10, Bluff +10
Languages: Common, Elven
SQ: Sneak Attack +3d6, Corrupting Touch, Malevolence

Malevolence (Su): The ghost's jealousy of the living is particularly potent. Once per round, the ghost can merge its body with a creature on the Material Plane. This ability is similar to a magic jar spell (caster level 10th or the ghost's Hit Dice, whichever is higher), except that it does not require a receptacle. To use this ability, the ghost must be adjacent to the target. The target can resist the attack with a successful Will save DC 15. A creature that successfully saves is immune to that same ghost's malevolence for 24 hours.

Six Dwarven Kings

by Shadowy Silence

Six Dwarven kings met to discuss,
what many thought was quite a fuss,
One through Six they played their tricks,
But when thrown upon the giants plate,
They all met a grisly fate,
Killed by the ones they thought they could
trust,
All friendship had turned to rust,
What little rule did remain,
Died and withered all in vain....



Interview with Securis

by Grogg Tree

Well, after a longer than anticipated break, I'm back with my next victim's thoughts. I've decided to bring you face-to-face with one of the main people that worked behind the velvety curtain of DnDOG... Securis. As a retiring admin, it is fitting to give you his words right around the time he decides to step down and let other staff members shine in his place. So without further adieu, I give you this issue's Moderator Interview.....

How did you first find DnDOG?

Surfing the net, casually looking for an online venue to play D&D. I had looked at earlier times but had been unsuccessful. I got lucky, I think.

What were your initial thoughts of the site?

I was confused as hell. Even then, navigating the halls as a freshman was a bit difficult. I also had some technical trouble with my firewall versus vbulletin.

What is your favorite part of the site?

Anyone asked this question should say their own games. I play peek-a-boo all over the place. But I spend a lot of time in the staff forum, my games, General Discussion, and Site Discussion.

Why did you decide to take the responsibility of being a staff member?

Just after the 'great schism', there was a service vacuum. You could see the boards going into the tank all over the place. Krowout, Pheonix and Medesha were it. They needed help so both Ridin and I volunteered.

What do you feel is your greatest contribution to the site?

This is hard to answer. I've had my fingers in all sorts of things over the years. I could talk about the current culture of the site, the way games are accepted, advertised, and to some small extent, the way that some people play in the pbp format. That last, there are a lot of great gamers that had hands in forming that aspect of gaming on site. Those are all some pretty important things but the greatest, I'd say I feel the most proud about the staff. They are awesome in so many ways and I get to say, "I assembled that team." Yep, the staff.

Why did you step down from being a full-fledged Admin?

Well, for the longest time my job was to hold the status quo. The site in V3 had so many problems and so many promises were made. I sat on my side of the screen saying, "Wait, it'll be worth it!" for so long that I became embedded in that mentality. I saw V4 come into being along with all the new features and all the possibilities for new bells and whistles. I felt like I had contributed what I could to the development of the site as it was and to the new foundation for what it is going to be. Seeing these things come to pass, which was my essential mission, I decided that fresh eyes should be the guides into the newest era of DnDOG. I felt like this new perspective that has come with my departure constitutes new blood and thus a stronger, brighter future for the site. I kind of felt it as a changing of the guard. Actually, I'm still an Admin, I just have stepped way back to a simple consulting position with some sporadic moderation in the mix.



How involved in the gaming aspect were you during your Admin status and will that change now?

Staying involved in actual games wasn't too hard initially. I don't remember the point when running the site became my biggest game. I know there were times when I was handling nearly everything on an administrative level by myself for long intervals. No digs on anyone, that's just how it was. All that has culminated into my current activity level. I'm at an all time low and looking for a revival.

What sort of advice would you give for someone that wants to take a more active role in the site's progress forward?

That's easy. Stay positive, be helpful, contribute to site initiatives, and offer up ideas that you think will open the site to a better gaming experience. Even if you don't get chosen to be staff, you will have been working to make the site a better place to game. Gray, green, red; there's no real difference in this regard.

Do you prefer to participate as a player or as a DM?

I like DMing but I really enjoy playing more. I don't get to do it as often as I like but I'm hoping that changes in the coming year.

What is your favorite character, either PC or NPC?

I'm going to take this as, "tell us about your favorite character." I've had this drow fighter/sorceress that I've played off and on in several games on site and she turns up as an NPC in some of my games as a villain. Nilrysyn Bhintyrr, the weeping sorceress, is a rebuild of a character I played a long time ago. She's different from the original but I find her to be fun to play. Irreverent, slutty, bossy, impulsive, sly and deceitful. That about sums her up.

How long have you been playing D&D?
Started when I was 12.

Why do you play D&D?

For fun. I've always enjoyed seeing the world as a fantastic place where anything can happen. Reality, as we all know, isn't this way. D&D allows some facsimile of the fantastic.

How long have you been DMing?

I took on the DMing role pretty quick. My older brother liked playing and he never wanted to do it so that left me. 12.

Which editions have you played?

I started playing 2e then skipped to 3.5e a lot later. Recently, I tried 4e and the jury is still out.

Which edition is your favorite and why? Least favorite?

3.5 so far. It's what I've become most comfortable with. I don't do negative.

How many games have you DMed?

Onsite, 3. Offsite and a long time ago in a far away place, 1.

What games do you currently DM on DnDOG? (Briefly tell us about them)

Currently, I'm DMing an Underdark game (Elghinn Il'tess Wun I' Olath) set within the cataclysmic remnants of Ched Nasad. There's a race between spiders and shadows to gain the upper hand in rebuilding the Chasm. I just read the War of the Spider Queen series and find that I have some parallels but I'm not following along with that.

What is your favorite class and why? Least favorite?

I'm so the rogue. I just like being the sneaky persuasive guy that might or might not steal you blind. Being questionable has always resonated with me. Remember, I don't do negative. BARD.

What do you look for in a player?

Someone who can describe their character in more than one facet. I want to see, hear, feel, taste and know the thoughts of the character that I'm about to kill. Heh, heh, heh....

If you were to give one piece of advice to a new DM, what would it be?

Remember to be flexible. The game often doesn't go as planned. That's when it gets fun.

Ever wonder what sort of craziness you need to be in charge... have a look. Here are a few more personal questions:**It's well known that you are an artist, what is your favorite type of art to produce?**

It's a good question to which my answer has always been I like it all. Lately, I'm drawn to ceramics and welded metal. It's very satisfying to me because of the sometimes quick results. Next week, I might shift to painting portraits.

What can you tell us about all your poetry in the Library?

Typically, I make those up on the spot during my 'moods' which I've come to know as seasonal affective disorder which is due to a lack of sun. Sometimes, they're nonsense, sometimes coded deep personal feelings, and sometimes odes to my fellows in life and on site. I wrote Gath a poem once. It's one of my favorites.

What is your current career and did you always want to do it?

I'm an ART, capital A.R.T., educator. Nope. I've always liked making things and I accidentally discovered a talent with managing children. Here I am. Getting paid to play with kids. Yay!

Tell us about one of your worst habits or qualities?

My worst quality? I'm stubborn to a fault. If I decide something, right or wrong, rooting me out of my position is particularly impossible. I guess I should mention that when I get angry, I'm destructive to myself and others. Glad I've got that monster mostly under control. "You won't like me when I'm angry." ~David Banner~

If you are a god what would you do to the world?

Fill it with wine, women and satyrs.....

Which super power do you like to have and why?

I'm all for telekinesis and telepathy. I can't see anything being much better, practically speaking.

If I take a look inside your refrigerator what would I find?

What time of the month? Most of the time, gallon bottles of water and not much else.

What is your favorite book?

I reread the Silmarillion by Tolkien nearly once a year. My favorite character is Turin Turambar. You can't get more tragic.

How would you react if you are transformed into a fish?

<silence> I'm making the fish drowning in air face.

If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title should be?

Starch.

If it's true that we are here to help others, then what exactly are the others here for?

To create problems for us to fix, of course.

Ever wonder what the speed of lightning would be if it didn't zigzag?

Nope, can't say that I have. But I have wondered if it would be possible to rig an apparatus to ride in a tornado. And not die.

If a Monster Calls

by Terquem

The fire from the torches held in the hands of a few villagers cast long shadows across the newly finished steps of the church. Arnold Whittaker addressed the gathering of the folks of Holcumb. Most of the farmers were there, a few of the hunters and trappers who lived in small cabins to the east of the village where there as well. Arnold was nervous. He was not a leader. Arnold was a farrier, he shod horses, and that made him the most skilled man in the village.

"How do we know they won't eat us?" Roger the farmer yelled from where he was standing at the back of the crowd. Roger was middle aged, tall and thin but strong, and a good, hard-working man.

"Well," Arnold said, "They've never eaten anyone in the village before, Roger, and we need their help. If we all go out there and ask them, I don't think they will say no. They've asked some of us for help in the past, and we've helped them when we could. My father helped that girl that is their leader and he never asked for anything in return. We need that old mill. For years now we have been sending grain all the way down the road to Insgreen and they charged more to grind last year than the one before. You have a crop coming in Roger, and so do you Ellis, and Merle. With this new church completed, and the hall going up, there's going to be more people coming here. The village is growing. The old River's Bend Mill has sat abandoned for over ten years because of that ghost and I don't know any other way of getting rid of her other than asking for the monsters to help us. Besides

some of them eat regular food, not people, and if we promise them a good price on bread, and other goods I know they will at least agree to look into it for us."

The villagers groaned and murmured amongst themselves, mostly making weak arguments against Arnold's plan.

"Unless," Arnold said and stepped forward to the edge of the first step. He was an old man and shaky on his feet. Behind him, standing in the shadows, a small dark green skinned woman stepped forward into the light and gently took hold of Arnold's elbow to steady him. "Unless there is someone among you who wants to go up river to the mill yourself and see if you can deal with Helen Red Ribbon of River's Bend Mill. Olga here, our new priestess has agreed to bless anyone who agrees to go. I've got a spear, belonged to my father, and old Gregory has given us his armor, from when he fought with Duke Fredrick's army against the ogres of Rainyfield Fen fifty years ago, it's still in good condition and Tabitha has sewn in new leather and padding. These things are free to anyone willing to go."

They all were silent.

"Anyone?" Arnold asked again.

"I'll go," a voice from the crowd said. It was young Waldron Pinner. Waldron was a strong, square-shouldered and slightly chunky fair-haired boy. He was the teenage son of Bill and Hilda Pinner. Bill and Hilda kept dairy cows, seven of them. In a village of mostly poor farmers the Pinner's were considered wealthy, even rich by everyone's standards.

"I'll have none of your nonsense Wally," Waldron's father said. "I agreed to come out this late because you begged your mother and me, but she'd have my hide if I let you go through with it. You're no hero, boy, you're only fifteen and got your whole life ahead of you. I won't let you."

"But Pa," Waldron interrupted as his father was speaking. "Mister Whittaker is right. We need the mill."

"I'm sorry, young Wally," Arnold said. "We can't go against your parent's wishes. They know what's best for you."

"You're all just afraid to stand up to him because you think he's rich. You think he has money and because he helped pay for the church and the new hall no one will stand up to him anymore," Wally said, clenching his fists at his sides.

"That's not true Wally," Arnold said. "But you should go with us, and your father should come to. If we all go, as many of the village as can make the trip out into the moor, we can show them monsters we mean them no harm. We can show them we need their help. We'll ask them to go to the mill and talk to that ghost. Maybe they can make her leave. If we can recover the mill our village will only get better for everyone, even them."

A chorus of voices sounded out in agreement.

"But why do we have to go at night?" asked Drew Tanner, a trapper wearing thick hides and an animal skin hat.

Arnold came down the steps of the church with Olga helping him along the way. As he came alongside Drew he slapped the burly man on the shoulder and said, "Because we all got work to do during the day. Let's get moving. If we hurry we can be back before midnight."

There are three roads leaving the village of Holcumb. One road, the good road, goes east. It is a wide road paved with stones and built by King Ulan Tringun over a hundred years ago. The second road is not as nice as the first road. It is a dirt road, hard packed, but muddy when the river swells in the spring from the snow melting in the mountains to the north. That road, the second road, goes to the north and follows the river. That is the way you go if you want to find River Bend Mill.

The third road is very old. No one knows who built the road or when. The road is paved, but not with stones, like the King's road, but with a hard black solid surface. The road goes toward the west, toward the Aben Moor. It is a place where people do not choose to go. This road winds through the twisted trees and dark pools of the Aben Moor, and beyond. No one in the village knows what is beyond the Aben Moor, but everyone knows of the house on the hill in the moor where the monsters live.

With torches in hand the villagers left Holcumb and took the west road into the Aben Moor. As they walked they shared stories with each other, stories about the monsters of the house on the hill. Some heard that the house was surrounded by an iron fence with poles topped with human skulls. Others heard that the monsters skinned people alive and hung the skins from the eaves of the house, and that even on still nights, like this night, a chill wind blew through those eaves and made the skins dance.

"How many monsters are there?" Wally asked Farmer Douglas who was walking next to him.

"No one knows for certain," Farmer Douglas said

Wally had never talked with Farmer Douglas before tonight. The old farmer was a big man, tall and heavy. He had a kind face and a

full head of white hair. Wally thought the man was old, but he had no real idea how old Farmer Douglas was.

"My wife's father," Farmer Douglas said as he lifted his hand and introduced his wife who was walking on his other side, "This is my wife Lisa."

Lisa Douglas was a Beauvingian. She had green skin, like the priestess Olga. She was beautiful and looked to Wally to be much younger than Farmer Douglas.

"My wife's father," Farmer Douglas started again, "settled in this village with his parents a long time ago. He told me that the monsters appeared right after his family moved here from the city of Hapursaburg. He recalled that there were five of them then, a construct, a golem, a vampire, a wyfwolf and a demon. I don't know much about monsters, but I think these monsters are all immortal. They are very dangerous, and can't be trusted."

"No one really knows why they came here," an old woman who Wally didn't know said. She was walking behind Farmer Douglas and took a few quick steps in order to get closer and join in on the conversation. "I heard my mother once say that her brother, my uncle Dwayne, went out to the house on the hill in the moor to ask a favor from the demon. They say he would grant a wish to anyone who could tell him a riddle he couldn't answer. Dwayne came back to the village a broken man, his mind twisted. He disappeared a few years later and no one ever knew if he got his wish or not."

"Have they ever attacked the village?" Wally asked.

No one answered, but in the flickering torch light Wally could see the looks on everyone's faces. It was a strange look. Not a look of fear, or of keeping secrets, but a look like each person was trying hard to remember if they had ever heard a story about the

monsters attacking.

The villagers came to a bridge. It was a wide, short bridge spanning a small stream, built from what looked like one enormous solid piece of stone. At each corner of the bridge was a tall square pillar with a hollow place near the top. Iron rings were set in the roof of the hollow space and large lanterns were suspended from the rings. The lanterns were lit, and bathed the bridge in a soft yellow light.

"This is the bridge," Arnold said. "According to what I've been told we cross this bridge and just beyond it is a path on the right that leads to the house. Anyone who wants to turn back now should do so."

No one moved.

"Then we are going on," Arnold said and started across the bridge.

No one moved.

Arnold stopped half way across the bridge and turned around. "Come on everyone, there's nothing to be afraid of."

A short old man, wearing a heavy gray hooded robe, came across the bridge from the other direction. He was a normal enough looking old man. He stood with his shoulders forward and walked with a cane, made from a twisted and rough looking tree branch, in his right hand and a small lantern in his left. His face was pale and wrinkled like old leather. His nose was bent and turned down at the tip. He came up quietly behind Arnold and spoke loud enough for everyone to hear.

"The others sent me. We saw your lights coming down the road. We want no trouble from villagers like yourselves. We've done nothing wrong. Why have you come?"

Arnold was startled and as he tried to turn around he stumbled and lost his balance. He began spinning his arms in great circles as he fell backwards away from the old man.

Waldron and Olga were the first, and the fastest to act. They reached Arnold before he fell to the ground and caught him, each one of them taking the old man by one of his arms.

The old man in the grey robe laughed and said, "Sorry sonny didn't mean to frighten you. You've got fine friends. Who's in charge here?"

Arnold, with Olga's and Waldron's help, righted himself and said, "I am Arnold Whittaker of Holcomb village. We are going to see the monsters that live in the house on the hill in the moor. Do you mean to say that they sent you?"

"Yes," the old man said. "We drew straws and I lost. We were all sleeping. Abigail is a light sleeper and she woke from the light coming through her window. You passed the house back there a ways. It's on the right but you have to come to this bridge and double back to get to it or wade through the creek. I hear it's cold and the rocks are slippery and I don't care for that at all. Why did you people come all the way out here in the night to see us?"

"We want to ask for your help," Olga said. It was the first time Waldron had heard her speak and her accent was thick. She made her w's sound like v's and rolled her r's, and Waldron though her voice was very beautiful.

The old man came a few steps closer when he heard Olga speak. He held the lantern up to her face and the light from it illuminated her green skin and dark black silky hair.

"You are Beauvingian, yes?" he asked.

"I am," Olga replied.

"It is nice to see another Beauvingian. It has been many years. Tell me, Agnocritus Moracovanatum Serula?" he said in a strange tongue Waldron had never heard before.

"Moracovata?" Olga replied in the same language with the sound of a question in her voice. "Sisturacu Agnocritatum Puratitatus, Hamthiru ebu Molloweenarium."

"A priestess of Molloween you say," the old man said with a frown. "She who speaks to dreamers. Well before I show you all to the house I want your word that you villagers are not here to make trouble."

"No we don't want to make trouble," Waldron said. "We want your help."

The old man turned his lantern toward Waldon and looked at him hard for several quiet moments. "I don't like your eyes," the old man said. "But I believe you mean it. Follow me."

Slowly, with Arnold, Olga, and Waldron in the lead, the rest of the villagers followed the old man.

Waldron came close to Olga's side and whispered, "If he is Beauvingian, how come he is white and not green?"

Olga took a long breath and said, "He is undead, a being who is one of the unliving and may be a ghoul, a wight, or some other creature of negative energy."

"Vampire, actually," the old man said over his shoulder. "I'm old, yes, but hard of hearing, no."

The rest of the way everyone walked a bit slower, and much much quieter.

They followed a path, wide enough for four men to walk abreast, until it came to a clearing with a low hill in the moor. Atop the hill sat a large house. Lanterns hung on two columns that supported a little porch in the front, and there were lights on in the windows on either side of the porch. The house looked to be in good repair, and had shutters and curtains. It had a second floor. No house in Holcumb had a second floor. And there was even a balcony over the porch. A woman was standing on the balcony and Waldon could just barely make out her form in the light from the house. She looked thin and small. She wore a nightgown of bright white cloth and her dark brown hair fell down over her shoulders across it. She seemed to be looking right at Waldon and when he thought he could almost see her eyes she turned away and went into the house.

The old man stopped at the porch, turned to the crowd and said, "You all will not fit inside so I'm going to have to ask you, like good neighbors, to choose amongst yourselves who speaks for you and those people can come in, but no more than five of you. The rest can press their faces to the windows if you want, but mind you clean the glass if you leave any greasy fingerprints." He then went to the door of the house and opened it. Waldon, who was standing at the front of the crowd at the edge of the porch felt warm air and heard the crackle of a fire when the door was opened.

The villagers talked quietly among themselves and elected Arnold, Olga, Waldon, Farmer Douglas and Farmer Hanes, the man who spoke in front of the church, to go into the house.

It was one of the strangest experiences of Waldon's life.

The main room of the house was very large. There were two couches and six large padded and upholstered chairs arranged around a large round rug of brown and orange color, a desk for writing letters, another desk that had many bottles on it and a large fireplace with a mantle that had little statues and brass bells of various sizes on it. A fire roared in the fireplace filling the room with warmth. There was a smell in the room, coming from a room close by Waldon supposed, of spices and tea. The villagers stood at the edge of the rug, behind a chair, the only chair with its back toward the hallway where the front door was.

Around the room Waldron took in the monsters sitting on the couches and the chairs. Across from the chair with its back to him sat a metal woman whose head looked like it was part feline. She was copper colored, and her eyes were large and red. On the couch to her left sat a small hairy little creature who looked like he was a cross between a Halfling and a dog, and sitting next to him was the old grey robed man. Across from those two, on the couch on the other side of the rug sat, well sort of sat, a blue skinned woman whose lower half was that of a giant serpent. The coils of her lower half took up the whole of the couch. She had an exotic, strange-looking face with wide cheek bones and dazzling large green eyes. Her hair was the same color as the flames of the fire in the fireplace, red and yellow.

"There are only four chairs, but please sit down," a girl's voice came from the chair with its back to the villagers. "Betty can make room for one of you on the couch next to her..."

"The floor is cold," the woman with the snake for a lower half interrupted.

"We have guests Betty, please," the girl in the chair said.

The villagers walked slowly into the room and found places to sit. Olga and Arnold took two chairs near the couch with the dog man and the vampire, and the two farmers, Hanes and Douglas, took two chairs that were close to the fireplace. Waldron approached the couch where Betty, the half snake woman was sitting, and he waited, and watched in fascination, as she unwound her lower body letting it drop carefully to the floor. When enough of her had moved out of the way, Waldron sat down leaving a wide space between them. He now noticed that the snake woman was not wearing anything like regular clothes, at least not anything he would think was regular clothes. She had nothing but a small fitted top that covered her breasts. Her skin was bright bluish green, and was made up of very tiny scales that became larger as her human stomach became a serpent.

Waldron didn't realize he was staring at her stomach until he heard the girl in the chair clear her throat. He turned toward her and immediately realized that she was the woman, or girl, that he saw standing on the balcony. She was still wearing the bright white nightgown but she had piled up her brown hair on top of her head. Waldron didn't know what to make of her. She was pale blue in color, an unhealthy blue color, and he could see a terrible scar that ran all around her neck. There were other scars as well. One scar went across her right eye, which was dark smoldering brown, while her other eye was brilliant sky blue. There were scars around her wrist, but not in the same place on her wrists, one was higher up her arm than the other. Her fingernails were yellow. Waldron would have thought she was like the vampire, a thing of undeath if it weren't for her eyes. For although her body looked like it could be the body of a dead young girl, a corpse, her eyes were alive, bright and full of the spark of the living.

"Kenneth tells us you are here to ask for some kind of help," the girl said. "What kind of help are you looking for?"

Arnold said, "We have a problem with the old River's Bend Mill."

"What kind of problem?" the girl asked.

"Well miss, um, miss," Arnold was trying to say.

"You can call me Lily," the girl said. "And your names are?"

"Oh we're sorry," Waldron said suddenly standing up and walking toward the girl with his hand outstretched. Glancing at the other villagers, he introduced them in turn.

The girl reached for Waldron's hand and with all of his will he did not pull back. He braced himself for the shock of what he expected would be cold and clammy. But her hand was warm, and soft. She gently shook his hand and said, "I'm just Lilly. I have no other names. I am a living construct; I was once a golem. The others are Betty Dilishina, a Naga. Then there is Tabitha, also a living construct, but a different sort of one, she is made of metal, and not flesh, but you can see that. Leonard High Eagle is a kobold, and contrary to what you might believe he is not any part dragon. And you already met Kenny, Kenneth Louwer, a vampire. It is nice to meet all of you. Now why do you think we should help you with trouble with your mill? We are not millers, or carpenters, though Betty is good with her hands and does a good job of keeping the house up. Why should we help you?"

"There is a ghost," Waldron said. "Oh, I'm sorry I should let Arnold explain."

"No go ahead Wally," Arnold said. "You're doing fine."

For the next hour Waldron paced around on the rug and explained about the ghost of River's Bend Mill.

He told them the legend of Helen Red Ribbon, the young woman who was found murdered, hanging from the beams with in the mill. He told them the mystery of how she was lured to the mill and murdered. How she left behind a husband and young daughter. He told them that Helen's ghost haunted the mill and no one had been able to work there for over ten years. People had been attacked by the ghost when they tried to restore the mill just a couple of years ago. The ghost was violent, deranged and evil.

"What are we supposed to do about it?" Lily asked when Waldron finally stopped talking.

"Well, we were hoping that you, since you are, you are," Waldron tried to say.

"Monsters?" Betty asked raising herself up off of the couch and bringing her face right to Waldron's. "You expect that because we are monsters and you have a ghost that we are somehow going to be able to reason with it?"

Betty's large green eyes were staring into Waldron's. He didn't want her to think he was afraid of her, and he didn't want her to think that he thought less of her because she was different.

Waldron said, "Well yes you are monsters. We know that being what you are not only makes you different, to look at, but different in ways that make you stronger, faster, hardier. You are all something better than any of us. We think of you not as monsters to be feared, but definitely monsters to be regarded. Do you think of yourselves as monsters to be feared?"

Betty smiled at Waldron, and her hair changed color, from red-yellow to dark blue. "He has it in his eyes. You're right Kenny he really does have it in his eyes," she said.

Lily stood up and said, "I don't know why we should help you. I understand you think we are more capable of handling your problem.

But a ghost? That is something even we don't know how to deal with, exactly. Besides, what's in it for us?"

Arnold stood up and came to the center of the rug to stand next to Lily. "We know," he said as he reached for her hands, "That it is not easy for you to live here. You have done well, the house is very nice, but you must have wanted, a time or two, to be able to come into the village for any reason and not worry about any problems it might cause. We will change that. We will let everyone know that you are welcome within our village."

"That's a promise no one can keep," Kenneth said. "Word will spread that a vampire lives in your village and more people with eyes like Wally's here, will come to your village asking to be rewarded for putting a stake in my heart. It will never work."

"It could work," Waldron said. "Who has to know you are a vampire? We keep that a secret, or better yet tell everyone the vampire died and you are just an old man. If we all work this through together, for all of us, it can work."

Kenneth turned his head away and grumbled, "I don't even like bread any way."

"Do you have to know right away?" Lily asked. "Do you have to know now what our answer will be?"

"No," Arnold answered. "Not tonight, but soon. We have a harvest coming in about three weeks. We will need at least a week to repair the mill if you can drive the ghost out. So in a week, I think, yes we will need to know in a week. We have some weapons, a suit of armor if you want it. And we will help as best as we can."

"All right then," Lily said. "You can go home tonight and we will talk about it amongst ourselves. Someone will contact you when we have made a decision. Good night."

The villagers left the house on the hill in the moor and went back to their homes and cottages.

The very next day Lily and Tabitha came into the village and knocked on the doors of the new church. Olga answered their call and let them in. She asked them to wait while she went to get Arnold so that he could discuss with them the plan the monsters had made.

"Betty is repairing a cart we have, and Leonard High Eagle is helping her. They will meet us near Dallerd's Island, just south of the mill tonight at sunset, and they will bring Kenneth with them. If we have to stay more than one night Kenneth will need his coffin and so we are bringing it. We will help you with the mill, but we have one more request," Lily told Arnold.

"We are a poor village," Arnold said. "We can pay only a little, but if it is food, goods, or services that you need we can give you that."

"Tabitha needs maintenance. Some of her parts are getting thin. Other than that we ask that Olga and the boy called Waldron go with us when we confront the ghost," Lily said.

"I will go with you," Olga said.

"I cannot speak for the boy," Arnold said. "His parents are against it. This I know, and we must respect his parents."

"If the boy does not go, we do not go," Lily said. "We will wait near the grove of apple trees to the east of Dallerd's Island. If the Olga and the boy Waldron are not there by midnight, we will leave and your mill problem will remain your own."

It took Arnold the rest of the morning to convince the Pinner there was no way around the problem. Waldron's mother cried, but his father slapped him on the back and told him, "Do well son, and listen to your elders. Listen to these monsters and do what they ask, but do not put your life in harm's way for them. They are stronger, and better able to handle this than any of us. Be kind, and true, and come back to us in one piece with breath still in you."

Olga and Waldron, wearing the village armor, and carrying the spear that had belonged to Arnold's father, left just after noon for the apple grove near Dallerd's Island. The sun was setting as they arrived and they were greeted by the monsters.

"So what do we do now?" Waldron asked.

"We wait a while longer. There can be no sunlight when we wake up Kenny," Lily said. "Then we go visit this ghost."

Waldron noticed that none of them, not Olga, or Lily, Betty or Leonard High Eagle, were dressed as he was and he began to feel a bit silly.

"Do I really need this armor?" Waldron asked.

"Oh yes," Betty said with a sigh. Waldron noticed that she had at least worn more than she was wearing the night before. She wore a leather vest over a blue blouse. Her hair was deep red with streaks of black.

"Why do you say that?" Olga asked.

"And why does your hair change color?" Waldron added. He then noticed that Lily had braided her thick, long brown hair and she was wearing woolen trousers, calf high black leather boots, and a vest similar to the one Betty was wearing, but under that she wore a simple brown tunic.

"I am a naga," Betty said. "Our hair, and sometimes our scales, changes color with our moods. I'm excited, and a bit nervous. So naturally my hair is dark red. I don't like armor, it interferes with the magic I can work, and it's hard to find armor to fit this body," she said cupping her hands to her sides above her human waist. "Leonard High Eagle works magic like I do and also has problems with finding armor for him that doesn't chafe. Tabitha is made of bronze, or something like it and can take a lot of physical punishment, and Lily and Kenneth, well they have bodies that heal in special ways. You and your priestess friend, Olga is it? You will need protection if this ghost tries anything to harm you. Where is your armor Olga?"

"I will summon a protective field if I have to. I am a poor woman and I do not have any armor, or any weapons," Olga said. "I will stay not too close and help with my magic if I can."

"That's a good plan Olga," Lily said. "Well I think it is dark enough. Let's wake Kenny and go visit this ghost."

When Kenneth was awake and out of his coffin the group began the walk northward to the mill.

"What has this ghost done before?" Lilly asked as they walked.

"I don't really know," Olga said. "I am new to this village."

"Well I don't think it has killed anyone," Waldron said. "But I know some people have been pretty well beaten up. I've heard stories the ghost moves things around, throws things at you and one story says that she appears sometimes and is so hideous that people have fainted and never been the same again after seeing her."

The mill came into sight as they rounded a bend in the river. The water flowed down a natural waterfall of broken stone into the river just north of the mill. Years ago a diversion box had been installed and some of the river's water flowed through it onto the top of the water wheel that drove the mill wheel. The water was still flowing through the box, but the wheel wasn't turning, it just splashed across the top of the wheel and fell back into the river.

By now it had grown too dark for them to see and Olga took a small hand lamp out of her shoulder bag and lit it. The lamp gave off a soft yellow glow that allowed Olga and Waldron to see within about ten feet of them. "Stay close to me Waldron," Olga said. "If you get in the dark you might lose your way."

"He won't lose his way," Lily said. "And he doesn't need to stay with you. Light up people."

Betty, Leonard High Eagle, and Kenneth all recited magic words and made similar gestures with one hand. On the ground in front of each of them a small pebble began to give off light much brighter than the light given off by Olga's lamp. They each picked up a pebble and the whole group was surrounded by light.

Olga whispered into Waldron's ear, "I can do that too you know. I was just saving it for a more important situation."

"Tabitha you go in the lead," Lily said.

"Kenneth you're next and then Betty and Leonard on each side of Wally here. I'll be right behind you. Olga you can stay outside, but stay close to the door and keep it open. If someone calls for you, be ready. Your magic can't help me, Tabitha, or Kenny, but it is good for Betty, Leonard High Eagle, and Wally. We go in and stay together and see if we can make her show herself. We'll give her a chance to talk, but if she is violent, we

go after her with magic first. Tabitha and I will try and keep anything solid from connecting with anybody. Does everyone understand?"

"Yes," they all answered, except for Waldron.

"Is there something bothering you Waldron?" Lily asked.

"You didn't say what I was supposed to do?" he answered her.

"Oh that's right I forgot what your role is," Lily said with a grin. "You're the hero. It's in your eyes. We've all seen it before. Men like you are born to it. Truth is you never can really tell a hero how he or she is supposed to be a hero, it will just come to you. You'll see."

"But what if it doesn't?" he said, his voice sounding a bit nervous.

"He needs encouragement," Betty said.

"Yes definitely encouragement," Tabitha added.

"I guess you need to be encouraged," Lily added as all three of the monster girls crowded in around Waldron.

One at a time, beginning with Betty, the three monster girls took Waldron's face in their hands and kissed him on the lips. He was shocked at how it felt. He had never been kissed before. He closed his eyes each time and was surprised that it didn't feel bad. Even Tabitha's kiss, though metallic, was soft and warm.

"Well now are you encouraged?" Lily asked.

"What about Olga?" Betty asked.

"Yes the priestess woman did not encourage the hero. This is a bad sign," Tabitha purred.

"No really it isn't necessary," Waldron said.

Olga handed the lamp to Betty and repeated the same kind of kiss the others had given to Waldron.

"These are strange customs you monsters have, but I will not bring bad luck on us," Olga said after she removed her lips from Waldron's.

Waldron smiled and was about to say something when the door of the mill was suddenly flung wide nearly coming off of its hinges.

Tabitha sprinted through the open door. Kenneth glided after her, rising above the ground he floated faster than he could walk. Betty took Waldron by the arm and pulled him with her as she slithered after the others. Lily gave Leonard High Eagle a little shove and the two of them went into the mill behind the rest.

The inside of the mill shook with a low throbbing sound like a voice from beyond the grave moaning in deep sorrow. A wailing wind blew all around, dust, small rocks and pieces of wood spun crazily in the wind threatening to strike them and they had to cover their faces with their arms.

A loud crack sounded above them and huge pieces of the ceiling rained down. Kenneth was caught in the debris and buried under wood and rock tiles.

The moaning stopped. It was suddenly silent and the wind died. There was only the sound of small pieces of debris falling to the ground. Then a scream, loud and piercing rang out. The scream was inhuman, impossible, and went on and on.

Betty rushed to help Kenneth as he struggled to get out from under the collapsed roof. He was bleeding. His left arm was torn from his body at the shoulder.

"Kenny your arm!" Betty cried, but was drowned out by the scream.

Then she appeared.

Waldron was the first to see her. She appeared small as if she was far, far away. She wasn't all white, like Waldron had thought she might be from all of the ghost stories he had heard as a child. She looked almost normal. She was a pretty woman of about thirty, with a blue peasant dress covered with red ribbons. As she grew larger (came nearer?) Waldron realized to his horror that the red ribbons he thought adorned her dress were actually ribbons of blood. The red ribbons of blood flowed out of wounds on her arms and legs, her torso and neck, and even her face. Her eyes were gone and red ribbons of blood flowed out of the empty sockets. She continued to grow until she was twice the size of a normal person. Her screams went on and on and she floated in a slow circle around the broken mill wheel that Waldron could now see was jammed keeping the water wheel locked in place.

Betty tried to keep Kenny on his feet but he kept falling down, and it looked to Waldron as if the vampire was suffering.

Leonard High Eagle cast a spell that summoned a group of small flaming embers near his hand. With the flick of his fingers the embers darted in crazy arcs across the mill and unerringly struck the ghost of Helen Red Ribbon. The ghost lunged toward Leonard its face exploding in a gruesome bloody distortion of a human face. Leonard let out a yelp, and fainted dead away.

With the screaming stopped, Waldron yelled out, "Betty your magic!" But Betty seemed frozen in fear. Waldron grabbed her by the shoulder and spun her around only to see that Kenneth's real trouble came from a small sliver of wood, no larger than a soup spoon lodged in his chest.

"Olga!" Waldron yelled, and then added "Lily where are you?"

"I'm here!" Lily yelled back.

Waldron turned to where he had last seen the ghost and saw that Lily was grappling with it. Lily was trying to force a rope around the ghost's neck, where the rope came from Waldron could not tell.

Olga had come into the mill and was on the ground holding Kenneth.

"Can you do anything for him?" Leonard asked coming up behind Olga.

"Yes, but you must tell no one what you see," Olga said. Her voice was shaky and she grabbed Waldron by the front of his shirt and kissed him again. "Tell no one our secrets Waldron," she said.

"I won't I promise," he said.

Olga cast a spell. Waldron had seen healing spells cast before, but this was different. He felt a cold wave of energy rush by him and into Olga who channeled the negative wave into Kenneth as she pulled out the stake in his heart.

"What was that?" Waldron asked.

"A healing spell, only one that works in reverse. It would probably be enough negative energy to kill someone like you Wally, but for a vampire, well it may be just enough to keep him alive until his own healing magic can work. It may or may not save him, but it is all I can do," Olga said.

"You can do that?" Waldron asked.

"I shouldn't, but yes I can. And it is our secret."

It was quiet. Waldron looked up to see if Lily was still wrestling with the ghost. He didn't see them.

"Lily, where are you?" He called out again, and then found one of the magical glowing pebbles that had dropped.

"I'm over here hero." Waldron heard Lily's voice from the other side of the mill wheel.

Going around the ruins of the mill Waldron found his way to Lily. She was sitting on the ground with the corpse of Helen Red Ribbon in front of her. The corpse was still moving, not alive, but moving, struggling. Lily held the corpse in place with the rope around its neck.

"Tell him," Lily said.

The corpse spoke. The voice was a rasp as if someone pulled a cloth across a rough piece of wood.

"I am held by the rope that held my body after I was murdered. What do you demand of me?"

"Where did you find the rope?" Waldron asked.

"I climbed the building as soon as we came in. If someone cut her down, I figured, they probably didn't untie the last part still tied to the beam. I found it. When I touched her with it she became corporeal. Now ask her to leave the mill."

"Helen leave this place and haunt it no more," Waldron said.

Betty, carrying the unconscious Leonard High Eagle, and Olga, supporting Kenneth with one of her arms, came around the mill stone just then.

"I will not!" Helen Red Ribbon screeched. "I will not be banished until my murderer is made to face me, alive or dead. Bring my murderer to the mill. Until then I will not leave this world. All of you are cursed with this plea. All of you, living and dead, are bound to this place, this crime, and this spirit. Until my murderer is brought before me you will never have this place free of me."

"What?" Lily said releasing the rope as if commanded to do so. Waldron watched as her face made an expression of disbelief as her hands released her hold on the ghost.

The ghost of Helen Red Ribbon rose slowly and turned to face all of them in turn raising one arm dripping with blood she spoke again, "I will haunt this place until my pledge is fulfilled. Bring my murderer to me. Only then will I be free." And then she vanished.

"Well that's just great," Kenneth moaned. "I told you all it was in his eyes. He is an adventurer, a hero, and now he has got us all involved. I hope you all are happy. You get to carry around the box everywhere you go, and this time nobody better write 'Onion' on it."



The Other Side of Darkness

by Elucidus

My name is Ovarg. I am a full blooded orc of the Craglands making my way in the world of man and elf. My story is a long one and is how I came to be who I am.

As a child, I was unsure what sickness had given me this weakness of stomach and heart. I could not bear to witness, let alone participate in, the joys my brethren so often partook. I soon realized that my illness, my conscience, was a gift of higher thought, not a curse of a weaker stomach. My brothers think of me as a lesser being, inferior, if you will, because I have this 'weakness'. I don't consider it a weakness though. What it is... that is something you will have to decide for yourself. All I know is, after over a decade of mass brutality and unending torture I had had enough. It was time I take my leave of my brethren and seek a better way of life.

Introduction:

Ignorant about the area outside the Craglands, I only knew of a large city named Tardesh far to the east that my brothers often spoke of sacking. The rumor was that they accepted anyone regardless of background or racial blood. Growing up learning only of racial intolerance, I was unfamiliar with the concept of inter-racial harmony. Still I knew that if anywhere were to accept me, Tardesh was most likely that place. Deciding to head directly east, I packed up and headed out. I didn't even consider that it led me right through "the forest of the elves."

Once I was on the road, I worried about going through the forest. I knew elves hated orcs probably more than orcs hated elves.

The one thing that kept me on my course, the biggest reason I chose this path is I knew I would not run into any of my brothers in this forest. The orcs would never enter, unless they were in an organized hunting party. Going around the forest would have also added several weeks to my trip, something I did not relish.

I avoided the obvious game trails. I hoped this would allow me to travel through without incident. In fact, it worked for a couple of days.

Those first few days were very difficult for me. The sounds of the forest were quite unnerving. The Craglands had no such noises. I found myself waking several times throughout each night, scared of what lurked outside of my camp; kind of ironic when you think about how many others sleep terrified of an orc showing up at their camp. It didn't help that I slept with no fires and was unprepared for the chill of night.

I was on edge by my third morning. This forest was unlike the wide-open Craglands that I called home all of those years and it was wearing on me. I almost felt claustrophobic. Not being able to see the stars, the one comfort I relied on in the world, was very disheartening. I knew I had to push forward. I could never go back, not with how I left things. It escaped me back then how the elves lived like this.

On that third day, sleep deprived, dreary-eyed, sore muscles and emotionally raw, I had a hard time concentrating. That is when I saw my first elf. It wasn't the first elf I met. Let me explain and you will understand.

After a short bit of travel, I heard a soft sobbing coming from a clearing ahead. I poked my big head out from the bushes in the area only to see an elven youngling. Her face buried in her hands, talking to no one I could see. She was crying about her parents being unfair. To be honest my understanding of the common tongue at the time was not

very good. In fact, it didn't even dawn on me at the time that she was speaking common or how odd that was for an elven child, but that is a tale for another day.

Forgive me if I paraphrase as I didn't understand her very well. She cried about her parents not letting her see or play with another child because he was from another tribe or different. I am not sure exactly. Her accent sounded very exotic to me and I had a hard time not focusing on that. As her cries grew louder I suddenly realized that others may be around and may see me. I crouched down more, but I don't think it helped hide my bestial features very well.

She calmed down a bit, yet, continued to sob. My heart went out to her, to see such a pretty little creature so upset. It just didn't seem right.

I walked up to her. I stayed behind her and as soft and as well-spoken as I could manage, I said "Life will smooth out for you, youngling." She lifted her head for a moment as if to turn and look at the unfamiliar voice and unfamiliar speech. Before she could turn around, I gently put my hand on her shoulder and continued. "Understanding are your parents, but you must understand them. They have reasons."

Her head rested down again more listening to the words then how they were spoken. "Maybe you are right," she said and I relaxed a little, a mistake I realize now. She put her hand on mine as a thank you. Unfortunately, I wasn't quick enough to react before she felt the nature of my flesh. The sudden realization that I wasn't one of her own kind and the terror in her eyes as her head swung around and she saw me sent a shiver down my spine. I will never forget that little girl. Her long blond hair, a braid in the front died silver. Her greenish-blue eyes and bright red lips. Her soft voice and the green and blue clothes she wore with flowers drawn all over it.

I won't ever forget that shriek of terror that erupted from her lips as she darted off into the woods. It was then that I saw her ears through her flowing hair and I am ashamed to admit that even the youngling caused a small stint of hatred to fill me. A learned reaction I have never fully freed myself from.

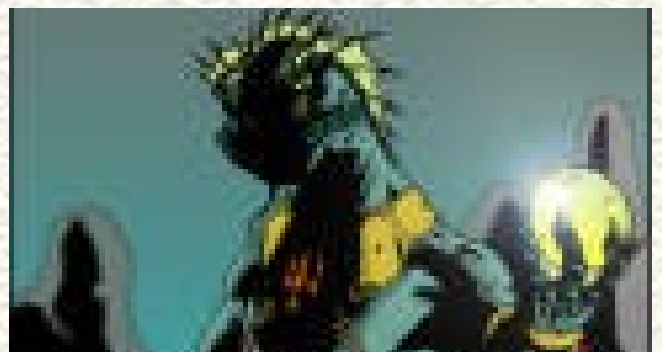
I knew I needed to get away fast. Without another thought I bolted the opposite way, even if it meant a little backtracking, whatever took me away from whoever she was running too.

I ran for what felt like hours before I finally decided to stop and catch my breath.

It wasn't long after that I heard someone approaching from in front of me. It was near dusk at the time and that played tricks on my eyes. They kept trying to adjust to the darkvision that allows my kind to see in complete darkness, but there was too much light still.

I quickly realized they weren't your typical travelers. I could clearly hear the solid, heavy footfalls of a man in bulky plate armor.

When I finally caught a glimpse of them, I saw that there were two. One was wearing some sort of hide armor, covering most of his body. He also had a bow strapped to his back and a short sword at his side. Not to my surprise this individual was an elf, and a feeling of anger filled my blood. I had been told since birth how much orcs are supposed to despise elves and how bad elves are. This inner hatred was born and bred into all orc-kind.



The elf's companion however, had round ears and was much sturdier. I thought his sturdiness could just be from the thick metallic armor he wore that glistened in the setting sun. A bastard sword at the armored figure's side hung low to the ground, combined with the large metal shield strapped to his back. This individual was a formidable sight and would have caused a lesser being to cower. However, I was brave, even in my emotion-filled state. The setting sun caught the shiny plate mail or the shield just right as the armored figure walked in my general direction and it shone in my eyes almost blindingly.

Suddenly filled with worry, my natural reaction was to find a place to hide. I looked around for the nearest brush and dove in head first. Upon landing and gaining a hiding stance, I realized that jumping into the brush was probably the worst thing I could have done. I immediately stopped moving and tried to listen to see if they noticed the noise I just made. Hoping against logic, I heard them talking in the common tongue, though I easily recognized the elven accent. That sent another surge of anger down my spine; I struggled to control myself at this point, all I wanted to do was run out there and tear that elf's head off and I didn't understand why.

They only spoke for a moment as one of them hushed the other, probably in response to the noise I had just made. As irrational as it was I held my breath hopeful they would move past me. At this point all I could hear were footsteps approaching me, even the sounds of nature seemed to stop. The problem was they were heading right towards me. I finally settled into the fact that they knew I was here and things were about to get a lot more complicated.

Unsure what to do, with only seconds to act, I hesitated. A mistake I would not soon forget. A cloaked figure approached me as I cowered trying to lay as low to the ground as possible. I noticed from the corner of my

I looked up just in time to see the tracker bearing down on me with his blade. Managing to raise my battle axe in an effort to defend myself, I avoided ending my adventure right there. After successfully deflecting the sword I rolled backwards and stood up yelling in my best common tongue, "I not want to fight." Oh, how I wished I could speak better common tongue, though most of my brothers cannot speak even the simplest phrase in common.

"An orc in an elven forest, trying to steal little girls, you are going down," the tracker screamed as he lunged at me again, trying to get an advantage.

"Damn it!" I yelled as I deflected the attack. "Leave me be! I not want to hurt any people!" He exclaimed, trying to restrain himself; just then he was knocked aside by the armored figure who ran into him with his body. A risky move even with me distracted.

"ARGH!!!" I yelled as I sprung at the armored figure in reaction, my great axe getting stuck in his shield as it nearly sundered. I laughed to myself for but a moment, but my celebration was short-lived as the tracker then thrust his short sword right into my gut.

The feel of cold steel piercing my abdomen was more than enough for me to lose myself to the rage. The feel of the life draining from the wound was gone in an instant. I couldn't think about it anymore. I couldn't see anything except my target. I looked up, turned on the tracker and aimed for his abdomen; it was the least protected part of his body. My axe swung with more than enough force to slice through the flesh of the now critically wounded tracker. Normally, I would have stayed the blow somewhat, trying my best to not kill the elf, but when I lose myself to the fury, I am no longer me. The tracker fell limp to the ground, his midsection cut nearly to his spine. I was still infuriated. Still unable to control the rage, and I turned towards the

armored figure and blocked the feeble strike aimed at me with my great axe. The swings went back and forth and both he and I were tiring, the rage was beginning to subside.

"That is enough blood," I yelled in orc as it was my native tongue and came to me much easier. After I averted another of the knight's attacks, I slammed into the knight with my body and knocked him stumbling to the ground. I stood over the knight with my greataxe in hand, reached into a belt pouch and the armored figure's eyes grew larger with fear.

"I said I not want a fight! Heal your friend and leave me be," I declared as I threw my most powerful cure potion at the knight's feet. I knew that kind of injury would not be healed, unless it was by the most powerful magic. The knight just stared at me in disbelief, frozen.

I put my greataxe on my back, turned away from the armored figure, and yelled at them both, "Go!"

After a small jog I turned to check on their status and saw the armored figure pouring the potion in his friend's mouth. I began to bandage my own wounds as I slowed my hustle to a walk and continued on my journey to Tardesh.

The next two days were pretty uneventful. I managed to stay out of sight and avoid everyone else I found traveling. After that second day though, I heard an interesting sound. The distinct and inexplicable sound of someone running in plate armor; this isn't something you hear very often, which is probably why it caught my attention. I poked my head out and saw that very same armored figure running right towards me. It was at that point that the knight yelled "Orc?! Orc!!"

"Damn it," I said to myself in the native orc tongue. "Why don't they just leave me alone?"

'Here we go again', I thought to myself as I pulled out my greataxe, raised it, and yelled, "Leave me, knight. I not wanted hurt your friend and I not want hurt you. I defend me!" This was all I could muster to get out.

As the knight approached, I noticed that he wasn't holding his weapon aloft. In fact, his hands were up in front of him. I wasn't sure what that meant. To me it looked like what the townsfolk did to show surrender. I guess I was close enough. "I just want to talk," the knight said breathing rather heavily. I still wonder if he ran that entire way.

"No!" I said in common. "No one just talks, all want is to fight!" I mumbled to myself in orc with a scowl.

Surprisingly, the knight answered in fluent orc, "I only want to talk. What is your name, good orc?" He said with a pant still trying to catch his breath.

That sounded like an oxymoron to me, no one had ever said that before. A good orc! I laughed to myself, wondering what this knight was trying to pull, but I decided to play along. "Ovarg."

"Well, Ovarg, I am Sir Kenneth and I need to apologize, both for my friend's actions as well as my own. I have never met an... um... a person like you that wasn't riddled with cruel intentions and malevolence before and with the little girl screaming about orcs, we just assumed you were up to no good. It didn't help that as an elf who has dedicated his life to defending this very forest against your kind he was sure you were trouble." His head dropped to the ground from shame. "It wasn't until you gave me that healing potion, and spared my life, that I realized you are no ordinary orc. I am sorry for everything. I hope you are well." He explained it all fluently in orc; he held his hand out in a gesture of a handshake.

"Just leave me be," I yelled back feeling a bit more emotional than I liked.

"I want to make amends; to make things right," he tried to convince me.

"You can't! There is no way to fix things," I bellowed back at Sir Kenneth.

"Of course we can," he argued, not understanding what I meant exactly; not knowing the regrets I held in my heart.

"I have tried. You can't bring back the dead and you can't undo what's been done. Apologies and explanations don't bring people back and don't fix anything," I tried to clarify, trying to make him understand; what's done is done.

"Hmm, I think I understand. You regret your past. Instead of trying to undo what has been done, why not strive to prevent bad things from happening," Sir Kenneth responded quite convincingly.

I sat there for a moment in contemplation. An orc protector, something this world has nary seen.

"I am a knight of Veryskos von Yuru, the Great Guardian, also called the Holy Protector of Presbos. I have dedicated my life to protecting the innocent. It would be an honor to teach you the ways of the Holy Protector."

I had heard of this Veryskos, a minor god dedicated to the protection of others, especially the weak. I probably fought some of his soldiers in one of the many raids I had partaken.

"Are you serious?" I asked with a tuskly smirk. "An orc protector? That is quite a prospect. Orcs are good for only one thing and that is destruction," I said quite forcefully.

"Well, my orc friend, I firmly believe your fate and purpose in life are strictly up to you. The only guidance you need is that of a guiding hand and the only help you need is

that of a friend at your side. You handing that cure potion to me proved to me that not all orcs are brutish thugs of pure destruction."

I smiled then, which was quite a sight with those odd tusks I have, "That was just because I didn't want your wrath upon me for killing your friend," I tried to convince Sir Kenneth. In truth though the violence and pain I have caused others repulsed me to the point that I could no longer stomach it, even in self defense.

"I do not believe that, and I don't think you do either. If you have some time I would like to take you to our temple and have you speak to our high priestess." Sir Kenneth insisted very politely in orc, which was quite a feat itself, as the orc language was never meant to be spoken in such a polite manner.

"So you are serious? Why would a human want to try and make a protector out of me?" I asked, quite confused at this point.

"So you can help others, of course."

"This is intriguing, I think I will speak to your high-priestess, but I do not make any promises," I answered, sounding fairly polite myself. This knight seemed to have quite an insight; maybe I was too obvious about my feelings. They do often get the best of me, especially my anger. Maybe this high priestess can help me gain control of this anger.

So Sir Kenneth and I headed to this temple of Veryskos in the nearby village of Icarough.

Neither one of us spoke very much. It seemed like we were both trying not to offend the other. Upon nearing the village of Icarough, I started to feel a bit vulnerable. I didn't think it was a good idea to walk around a village looking as I did. "Shouldn't I cover up before we go into the town? I mean most humans aren't very tolerant of orcs," I suggested.

"No, good orc, that will not be necessary. The townsfolk are very open-minded here, they will have no problems with you," Sir Kenneth assured me.

"if you are sure," I reluctantly responded, still quite unconvinced.

After walking for what seemed like a half a day, I saw the top of the entrance sign for Icarough between the trees. It was still a ways off, but I could tell it was very worn. It looked quite dilapidated and much like many of the towns I raided with my brethren. I remember watching my brethren impale the villagers on the poles holding up the sign, spreading their intestines and other innards across the welcome sign, and even playing street games with their body pieces or heads as their children or parents watched.

"Oh, I don't feel so good, I need to sit somewhere," I said trying to change my thoughts to something more pleasant.

"Of course. Are you all right, good orc? What's wrong?" Sir Kenneth asked politely.

"Yeah, I'll be fine," I responded, unable to convince even myself, as I struggled to remain standing long enough to not hurt myself while plopping down.

After about a minute, I told Sir Kenneth we should keep moving and he helped me up as I was still a bit queasy. How pathetic, I thought to myself, an orc getting uneasy over mere memories and images. A moderate anger built up at the thoughts, but I pushed it down.

Soon after that and out of nowhere a childish screech was heard. "A Monster! HELP!?" A little girl yelped as she ran back towards the village.

This immediately brought about images of only a few days ago, this little girl was human and had brown hair, but it had the same effect on me. How I wished a child

would not mind the sight of me, let alone look up to me, to think of me as something more than a monster.

As I watched the girl run away, someone suddenly jumped on my back; I was unable to do anything as I was caught off guard and pulled off balance. This person wrapped their arm around my neck, a small arm. As I staggered trying to get my footing a dagger was plunged into my chest. This wasn't the minor flesh wound I experienced a few days earlier. The sting of the cold metal washed over me and I was unable to breathe.

"You will not hurt anyone here, you beast" A female voice was heard yelling, barely audible to me as I fought to stay conscious.

All I could do was try and breathe and feel the shiver of death creep up my spine. With that I dropped to the ground; my legs unable to support my weight as the world began to get dark. I looked over at Sir Kenneth, with a look of terror on my face, while Sir Kenneth yelled "Angel! No!"

The world quickly grew dark and cold. Sir Kenneth ran over to me and before I even hit the ground, Sir Kenneth laid his hands upon me, said a quick prayer, and positive energy transferred from Sir Kenneth to my now unconscious body.

As I slowly began to regain consciousness I noticed I was now sitting next to Sir Kenneth, but I couldn't really focus as my body was still absorbing the magical healing.

A pretty, wide-eyed, young woman stood up and looked at me with a hint of innocence in her eyes. "Wha?" She stuttered the smile slowly fading from her face in her confusion.

The first thing I saw when I was finally able to look around was Sir Kenneth's big ugly face in my own. Startled I quickly jumped up and pulled myself clear of Sir Kenneth.

The woman was standing behind Sir Kenneth staring at me. "Whoa there, my friend. She did not know who you were."

"But Sir Kenneth, I don't understand. Why would you protect an orc?" this woman asked, her voice disconcerted.

"He is not just any wicked old orc. There is something different about him. I cannot explain it here; he is a good man, you have to trust me."

"A good man?" I thought to myself. I had no idea what he meant. To me a man was a human male, but the meaning didn't completely miss me. I slowly realized that to call me that was to distinguish me from just another monster. This made me feel very uncomfortable. In fact, every time this knight spoke of me as 'good' I had a shot of anger shoot down my spine.

"I trust you, you know that. If you say this orc is good, I will... back you up," Angel said, though she didn't sound fully convinced.

I was still taken back by everything and trying to get my bearings. After I regained my composure, I did look at this woman more intently and to my surprise she was beautiful. Tall and slender, unlike any woman I had ever met. I couldn't help but stare silently at her as I admired her beauty.

Just as my eyes rose to hers and our eyes met, I felt a flutter in my gut like nothing I ever experienced before. My instinct was to look away, but I could not. I couldn't do anything. In fact, I wasn't able to think or speak. I was enthralled.

She was wearing some form of light chain mail that was glistening silver and gold in the sunlight. It highlighted her features quite splendidly. Her dark red hair was tied up behind her head. This made her hair look short in the front, but when she turned to the side I could see there were oceans of it just waiting to flow in the breeze. A strand

or two of her hair had come loose in the front and hung down in her face. It gave her a more natural look. I thought it accentuated her beauty perfectly. Her hair was shining in the morning light like a sea of brilliant dark silk.

Then I noticed how radiant her blue eyes were. In orc society blue eyes are unheard of. Plus, these were like the untamed sky on a peaceful cloudless morning. Just looking at her was as refreshing as a summer breeze on a hot day. She sparkled like a desert flower in the morning rain. Just then I realized they were both staring at me...I needed to say something.

She leaned towards me and sincerely said, "I am terribly sorry, are you alright?"

I cleared my head and managed to blurt out, "I... uh... I'm fine."

"I apologize for stepping out of line. I should not have jumped to conclusions. I am sorry." She bowed her head.

It was the most beautiful voice I had ever heard, it was like a magical song. Just then I looked up at her hair again admiring the way it gleamed in the sunshine. That's when I saw it. The most horrifying thing I had ever seen. Her ears...they were pointed...they looked like a... SHE WAS AN ELF! That influx of anger began again, but it was quickly overpowered but my desire for her. Not physically, I just wanted to be near her, to make her happy. How? What? How could this be? I was very confused and remained quiet for the rest of the trip.

"Ovarg, this is Threnody, a friend of mine," Sir Kenneth proclaimed as he glanced with a smile over towards Threnody.

"It is nice to meet you, Ovarg. I think we should cover you up with some robes or a hooded cloak," she suggested. "So no one makes the same mistake I made."

"Um,... yeah, that is a good idea," Sir Kenneth said as he winked at me. At least he acknowledged the earlier suggestion.

Soon after that I was covered up, we continued walking into town. As we entered, we headed for the temple. Sir Kenneth started to scold Threnody for her behavior.

I overheard him telling her not to sneak up on people and how holy warriors confront their enemies; they don't sneak up on them. He continued on about how a holy warrior doesn't set up traps or use poison. I found the conversation pedantic and I quickly stopped listening. It all seemed ridiculous to me.

Sir Kenneth kept this lecture going for quite some time, but all I could do was watch Threnody as she walked towards the temple in front of me. Good thing I was behind her or this would have been more telling. She walked so gracefully, I thought she must be pretty nimble as well, but put that thought out of my head.



Love Lost

by Vitus

I was drinking in a Wes-Kha tavern and minding my own business when a couple came in who were overdressed for the occasion. The tavern was for river men, wharf rats and hired swords like myself. It was called Mulligan's and there had been a murder in the alley only two nights before. He was dressed in a fine looking, silk sherwani and soft padded house shoes. She was half his age and doe-eyed in admiration at his bravery for taking her to a place where there were those of my kind and worse. Perhaps it was the jinn called Jealousy disguised in this couple's happiness that tricked my brutal nature out. Perhaps because she was the same age as my first love, but I was reminded of and could not help but dwell on the bitter past.

He also sat too close to me at the bar and laughed a little too forcibly as if to show he wasn't uncomfortable in the company of Mulligan's. The truth was hidden only from the girl. He was nervous and out of his element. All around us there sat the smelly dockworkers and ruffians of the river front. I could sense their anger at this intrusion as well. These two did not know what it was to toil and labor for a meager wage. They had not known the taste of another man's blood. Our unwanted guest slapped me on the back not looking at my face and laughed at a joke I hadn't heard. He was already drunk.

"My harelip friend, wouldn't you agree?" He asked the question as if I had been a part of the conversation with his adolescent arm adornment.

He still was only looking in my direction and not in my face, but I only grunted in response ignoring his uninformed and misplaced faux pas. Still he persisted.

"I said, 'Don't you think it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?'"

He repeated himself with a fake, dramatic emphasis that made me turn my yellow, orc eyes on him grimly. When he saw them, he recoiled a bit as the words of the cliché trailed past his lips ending in a whisper. I have no cleft pallet, only a rather orc-like nose and some pronounced lower canines. In many circumstances I pass for an ugly man, but there is no mistaking my half-orc parentage shoulder to shoulder in a dirty little river pub. This is the story I told this out of place couple.

We got word from one of our rock climbing spider scouts. From atop one of the famous 100-foot fingers of stone that forested the Shattered Spires he had seen the caravan several miles out in the fading light of dusk. It was the first raid of my fourth season in the pursuit. That would make me perhaps 14 years old at the time and an adult in the eyes of the orc tribe with whom I was raised. The Skunk-apes' bloodthirsty occupation was stealing whatever they could by raiding the caravans that crossed through the Shattered Spires from the Green Ocean on their way east and south to the seat of the Empire of Wes-Kha. The Skunk-apes stole and sold slaves. The number of slaves held often was used as a mark of wealth. The chief of the Skunk-apes while I was among them was a brutal killer named Grimlash who kept a harem of captive slaves, one of whom had been my mother.

The Skunk-apes prowled The Spires and particularly the various deepwater wells that were dug eons ago a civilization long forgotten. Travelers through the twisted,

dry ravines and box canyons were forced to stop at these oases among the harsh, arid environment that was this northern Skye Mountain wasteland. It was about one of these ancient wells that my tribe and I waited concealed in the high rocks surrounding the crumbling structure. Somehow the ancients cut a smooth, neat cave from the rock of a narrow canyon wall and channeled water from beneath the earth to a large, clear water cistern at its center. There was no escape from the high ceilinged chamber, and it was all too familiar to Grimlash.

The Skunk-apes were cave dwellers who were as brutal and cruel as any typical orc tribe. I was only a boy in the eyes of a man, but in this tribe I was a warrior. I painted my face with ash and dusted my body with the soil of the area, thus making a dirty camouflage. The lot of us crept forward, many clinging to the rocks about the opening to the cistern's chamber where the caravan of some 30 camels were making a camp. The room was massive enough to house them all along with their animals, which was why it was a favorite spot for the tribe to raid.

The sky was a moonless one, which in many orc tribes like our own was a good omen, but that night, the stars streaked across the sky in brilliant flashes. It was a wonder I had never seen before and it held me captivated. The rest of the tribe saw this as a dreadful omen and retreated demanding to talk to the shaman before making the attack. Grimlash had the cruel witchdoctor under his thumb and made him give a blessing of blood to set aside the fear of the tribe. I was not taken by their superstition, however, as my mother had often secretly mocked the orcs' fears when I was just a child. While the tribe bickered about the coming attack I had crept closer to the caravan camp and spied on a human girl from the caravan who was also gazing at the stars.

I had seen many women slaves captured, used, sold and never felt much for them. Like the others in my tribe I saw captive females as simply property. I had never felt any feeling for affection for any females of the tribe, nor anyone at all being as young as I was. One must understand that in tribal orc society, sentimentality is weakness and weakness is death. Still, this human girl caught my eye and captured my imagination. I saw my mother reflected in those human eyes as they stared off into the sky at the same shower of stars that had my tribe fretting like old women. She held no fear in her eyes, though and they met mine then for only a moment. I was hidden a good distance away but had forgotten myself in gazing at the star shower. I had looked away from her to the stars for a moment and when I looked back, she was looking back at me. I quickly found cover and scrambled away fearing my bungling may have alerted the caravan and thus at the very least cost me a severe lashing. Even when our eyes met she held no fear, but perhaps she was not aware that she ought to.

Once the tribe had been convinced, they commenced their sneak attack on the traders. By then, the caravan had had time to set up a guard and our advance was discovered before the trap was sprung, though I don't think the stargazer gave me away. Stupidity was ever the Skunk-apes' greatest foe and they blundered into a prepared defense executed by professional mercenaries from Bremmen Keep. They had been ready with or without a warning. Still sheer numbers and bold, suicidal rushes directed, but not led by Grimlash with his singing cat-o'-nine-tails overwhelmed their mobile defenses and soon the Skunk-ape raid descended in a violent festival of wanton destruction.

Every male in the caravan was killed in ways I needn't describe to you, but suitable enough to horrify the half dozen women travelers into shock. After that, camels were tortured, or eaten, or set on fire and driven into the night, but generally wasted as a resource. The supplies were devoured and what could not be taken in a warrior's pack was torn, broken or destroyed. I myself only took a small, blue bottle that I thought to be a drinking flask from an ancient looking, bearded man who lay dead when I found him. The old dead man was in fine robes which drew me to him and he had such a death grip on a large heavy book that I only took the bottle instead of it but still wondered at what was in the pages that he was so desperate to protect.

All of the women were captured, and Grimlash was first to claim as his prize. This was his habit, and the typical bickering took place over his ability to defend this claim again. Inevitably this led to more bloodshed after which the hulking chief tied the six women together including my stargazer over the bodies of two of the tribe's few hunters.

I knew better than to fix my eyes on the girl. This only led to more confrontation and another excuse for Grimlash to use his cruel whip, but the jinn whose mask is love has little time for thoughts of fear. Stupidly I found myself following the prisoners while the wanton murder and destruction still raged about us. I was waiting for something, though I didn't know what it was until my stargazer looked up from the ground into my searching eyes. She looked with neither the fear, nor with the defiance anyone would expect. Her eyes searched mine. She was calculating behind those sharp, brilliant eyes. Could she get what she needed from me? Would I help her? She was silently, but deliberately looking for a way out.

It is little wonder that in that same moment I began my plan to leave the Skunk-apes forever and I intended to take my stargazer with me.

The orc language has neither a word for compassion nor love. Indeed, to say in orc that you feel love for someone is only to say you do not fear them. Though my mother died when I was still quite young, I yet remember what it was to be loved by her and did then as well. It is a feeling for which I longed desperately. My stargazer looked at me without fear and perhaps I mistook this for love. I began hatching the plot for our escape on our journey back to the series of caves the Skunk-apes were calling home.

Deep in the center of a vast canyon maze there stood a towering natural obelisk. The sand stone had been worked by hands too long ago to remember and then eroded by wind and rain for the centuries that followed. Rumors abounded regarding who the original artificers of the tight cave complex were. Regardless of the cave carving culprits' identity, the current occupants were a large and prosperous tribe of vicious, conniving orcs. Access was limited to a spiraling ramp that did an entire lap around the rock spire before presenting the would-be guest before a cave mouth whose bottom half was blocked by a ramshackle wall built from stunted trees, piled dirt and parts of various trade carts that had been intercepted by the orc tribe. Atop the wall a sentry could lift a heavy wood door made from a wagon bottom. While crude and rough looking, this meager defense had been enough to keep this the Skunk-ape stronghold for many years.

Unbeknownst to the largely superstitious tribe there was another exit through the base of the spire. The lowest, unfinished tunnels in the warren reached a pool of foul smelling water. The witchdoctor convinced the tribe there were evil jinn that lived there. The few that had braved to drink it had gone mad, or so we were told. As a youth trying to escape the hated whip of Grimlash, I had ventured into these half-flooded, forbidden tunnels. I followed them until I was completely immersed in the brackish water and nearly caught in a narrow crack through

the stone. I then found myself in a shallow, crusty pool nearly a mile from the warren. I had found my escape route so many years before, but only found my onus to leave in the eyes of the stargazer.

The den was a smelly series of cramped tunnels that were inhabited in a chaotic fashion. All the orcs fought and bickered for territory most viciously within their putrid rat's nest. Grimlash had the largest quarters in the lower tunnels as he was large enough and brutal enough to defend it. Near his quarters deep within the labyrinthine tunnels there was a holding cell for his slaves. Though he kept a close watch on his small harem, the Skunk-apes had sense enough to keep them clean and more or less free from disease for better sale value. Thus they were taken outside for air and to relieve themselves once a day; terms that would seem generous to any orc community. They were kept under close watch at this time less from fear of escape than from them being taken by another band of brigands or being stolen by someone within the tribe itself. All of these things were common occurrences in any orc tribe. Nothing could be taken for granted, not even the structure of the tribe itself, if there ever was such a thing.

Though it was impossible for me to think of making an escape under the close scrutiny of Grimlash his loyal cronies, once back in the warren, however, whatever guard was charged to watch them would not be so observant. It was on this flimsy reasoning that I hatched my plan. I would wait for them to walk to the narrow passages nearest Grimlash's harem and just before they were so interned, I would grab my would-be lover and be on my way to the foul, forbidden water in the lower tunnels. I would stash supplies in a spot I'd picked two years before when I had run away from the tribe, only to have returned starving. This time, I would leave for good and take my prize with me.

The range of emotion within an orc tribe is not broad. The jinn called Naivety blinded me in ignorance, and I had assumed that were I to rescue the stargazer, she would return my love as if it were an exchange of goods. The Skunk-apes did not love. They knew they were more powerful together and did what was necessary to keep their tribe alive, but it was not out of love. I only knew my mother's love and had never known it since, yet I understood it was powerful.

The next day when they were brought back from their walk I lay in wait for the stargazer to be led with the other women through the twisted, narrow tunnels that took them down to the lowest level of the hollow, stone spire that I had thought of as home for many years. With supplies outside and carefully hidden the night before, I felt I had done the preparation I could afford before the slaves were sold or worse. With my sharpest knife in hand, I tried to keep it from trembling as Grimlash's dimmest lackey, Cuss approached as well. Cuss had a knotted string hanging from his belt, one knot for each slave. He did not have the ability to count so this simple article was his only means to keep track of how many slaves he was to take back to the harem. There was a long curve in the lower tunnels that then split into two. One led to the harem, the other to the forbidden waters below. It was in this one, near the curve in the tunnel that I waited with a surprise for old Cuss.

The dense orc had a weakness for strong drink, as many of the Skunk-apes did, and I was counting on the weird blue bottle I found to distract him enough to cut a knot from the string before he knew it. Then I intended to grab the stargazer and take her through the foul tunnels to safety. With the blue bottle left in plain sight for Cuss to find, I hid in the tight space of the crack in the wall that was the entrance to the foul water tunnels.

The smell from the tunnel brought tears to my eyes and the dripping from the ceiling was like the sound of an ominous spell of rain. Salt and sulfur permeated the air as the moisture collected the poison and dripped from jagged stalactites. I waited listening to the polluted shower and waiting for what I believed to be love to arrive. I heard Cuss and smelled him before I saw the lone guard pass. I was still as a stone as he approached. He saw the blue bottle and barked in delight. While he struggled with the cork, as I knew he would, I reached out with my favorite knife to cut the knot from his belt that dangled before me.

The stargazer couldn't see in the dark, but she inhaled sharply in alarm when she sensed I was there. I needed to calm her, so I whispered in the trade common my mother had taught me, "Friend."

Cuss was cursing that the contents of the bottle weren't spirits at all but just ash and water when he heard the stargazer gasp. He threw down the empty bottle and slowly came to some conclusions as he spotted my knife and the single knot in my hand. He actually started to laugh as he drew his short sword knowing it was now acceptable to kill me even though I was technically the chief's property. Then his eyes bulged like jaundiced grapes squeezed from their skin and a whisp of hot smoke escaped his piggish nostril. He gaped at the blue bottle now, and only at that moment considered what was in it if not spirits. He dropped his sword which I quickly claimed and threw both hands to his throat. Magical smoke billowed out of his nose and mouth and he staggered crushing blue glass beneath his crude sandals before dropping to his knees coughing and sputtering. With little time to consider my luck and thank the old, robed librarian from which I stole the bottle, I grabbed the stargazer, cut her bonds and made for the sulfurous tunnels.

She struggled against me at first assuming I was only another kidnapper who meant to do her worse harm than sell her into slavery. I struggled with words I hadn't used much since my mother's death. I told her I wanted to leave and I wanted her to come with me. She was blind in the black tunnels and terrified. The other women had already panicked and ran tied together back the way they came. I didn't tell her where her friends had gone for fear she'd want to go that way too. I jealously coveted her companionship, though I didn't even know her name. I told her I had a better way and that she would have to trust me. I think those words were what convinced her, for at that moment she only nodded blindly and gestured me to lead the way with her hand on my shoulder.

It took nearly twenty minutes to struggle through the tight spaces of the poisonous smelling tunnels. We held wet rags over our faces that were soaked in no time with the foul water but it provided little protection. A short section of the tunnel was completely underwater anyway before it reached the pool and though it takes only a few seconds to pass through it. They seemed an eternity as did the arduous time struggling to get there. Had we moved fast enough? Would we be discovered?

The hated jinn Naivety who had taken me on this pixie trail let me imagine I had escaped unharmed, that I would now know love again. When the stargazer and I emerged from our sulfurous baptism in the bottom of a narrow hollow and I saw the low ceiling of the cavern I cried out in joy feeling a final weight was lifted and freedom was upon us. The sound was muffled oddly and did not echo as one would expect in the water slicked cave. I wiped the stinging water from my eyes to see the chamber was filled with Skunk-apes. They laughed such a malicious, riotous laugh that I fumed with jagged hatred and trembling in my humiliated fury. My stargazer was torn from me while I was kicked and beaten to the wet, stone ground. They shoved and held me there as Grimlash stood over me smirking.

"You'll be a Thorn in my side no longer," the grotesque leader barked out the name and reason for which it was given to me in one final declaration. He grabbed the girl from his cronies that held her fast. She was blinded still and had she the heat sensitive vision of the rest of my tribe she might have fainted away. Instead, she held her head high and defiantly in the darkness of the cave surrounded by the entire, bloodthirsty tribe. Her poise made my heart ache. Her face was flush with blood and her heart burned with the heat of a girl who knew she was about to die.

Grimlash, who had known of the poisonous escape tunnels all along, savored the moment to express his hatred for me. He didn't care about the girl, but that I did was leverage enough for him. His eyes narrowed in evil delight at my misstep. He envied that I had learned to read and ever saw me as a threat to his leadership. He took his dreaded cat-o'-nine-tails from his belt slowly without taking his cruel eyes from mine. The orc chief dragged rusty barbs at the end of each of the leather tails across the stone floor before he pounced on her with an animalistic violence. Grimlash chuckled as he gave each stroke and watched my reaction as my Skunk-ape family held me and egged him on. She didn't cry out until the last few lashings that silenced her forever. Indeed, I watched my first love as she was flogged to death and was helpless to save her.

After the brutal, public execution, Grimlash thought it was more amusing to banish me bloody and beaten to starve amid the barren land of the Shattered Spires. After beating me savagely, they chased me from the box canyon throwing stones and jeers while I stumbled blindly into the wilderness. I wandered for days living on scrub grass and whatever rodents I could catch in snares. I was driven from my land because of this love.

"So I ask you," I declared to my innocent lovers who had stirred such long buried and bitter feelings in my breast. "Do you think it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all?"

The couple left Mulligan's quickly and without a word. Though the pallor on their faces told me I'd made my point.



Book of DOOM

by JJ_Wolven

"Tom, I don't care what you think of 'self-righteous' clerics OR how much it costs, next time we hire a cleric to come with us," Fred growled at Tom.

"I promise *gasp* I'll remember that *gasp* next time," Tom replied, out of breath from running, "but for now *gasp* just RUN."

A low moan echoed down the catacomb hallway as the spirit rounded the corner to catch sight of the fleeing adventurers.

There are many tools available in the battle against evil and the undead, each with its own degree of power and effectiveness. When it comes to ghosts, their incorporeal nature often makes it even more difficult to find the right tools. As the power of these spirits increases, so too does their resistance to some of the tools that are most effective against them: spells and turning. But the forces of good work tirelessly to overcome these challenges, making their spells and energies more effective.

Casting a spell as a Holy Spell, its level of sanctification becomes even closer to your deity than when Consecrated. The power of Good in your spell is amplified when directed at evil creatures.

Holy Spell [GENERAL]

Your damage dealing spells are particularly lethal against creatures of evil.

Prerequisites: Any good alignment, Consecrate Spell

Benefit: When casting a damaging consecrate spell against a creature of the evil sub-type, the half damage of the spell that is raw divine power is added in to the damage again.

by djrackley

Even as the good have their methods of fighting evil, so do the evil have their methods for fighting good. It is never certain which side developed the methods first, but they often have similar if opposite abilities. The unholy spell feat is the counterpoint to the holy spell feat.

Unholy Spell [GENERAL]

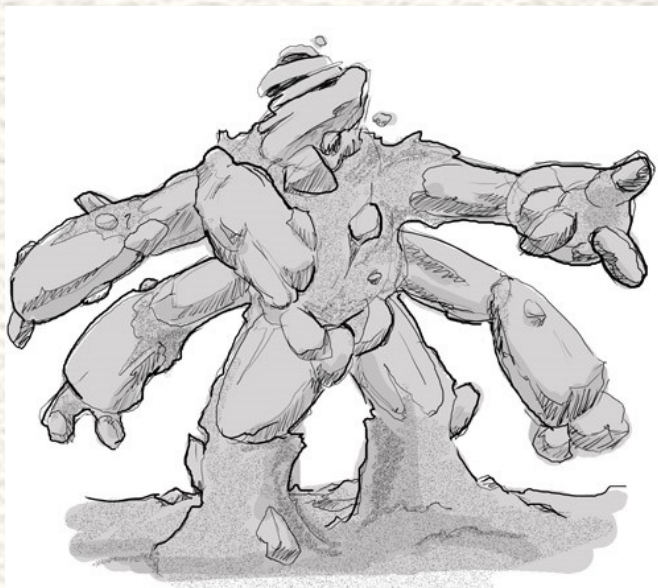
Your damage dealing spells are particularly lethal against creatures of good.

Prerequisites: Any evil alignment, Corrupt Spell

Benefit: When casting a damaging corrupt spell against a creature of the good sub-type, the half damage of the spell that is raw divine power is added in to the damage again.

by djrackley

Most churches of good consider the undead to be an anathema, and are always looking for ways to fight this corruption of life. For the powerful undead, even turning has a chance of making no difference as it is an "all-or-nothing" effect that cannot be directed at a specific undead creature. For many churches, the ability to affect most undead is enough, but for those truly dedicated it is not. Purity of Light was developed to direct the holy power of their turning ability into a focused point that targets a single entity and does divine damage to them.



DNDOG Sourcebook Project

The "Book of DOOM: Dnd Onlinegames Official Manual" is the official sourcebook of dndonlinegames.com, created through the DNDOG Sourcebook Project. The Book of DOOM contains optional materials that have been submitted by the gamers at DNDOG, discussed/balanced by gamers at DNDOG, and voted on by the DNDOG Soucebook Staff, also consisting of gamers at DNDOG.

We'd like to thanks everyone who contributes to our Sourcebook, recognized at the end of each of their submissions, as well as the current Sourcebook Staff (jj_wolven, Makenshi, TheChuck, aerondor).

If you would like to contribute to the DNDOG Sourcebook Project, you can submit your custom options in the [Public Submissions: Vol II](#) thread

Purity of Light [Divine]

You can focus your turning to obliterate strong undead with holy radiance.

Prerequisite: Ability to turn undead, access to the Sun domain, good alignment.

Effect: Ray

Range: Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Duration: Instantaneous

Saving Throw: Partial

Spell Resistance: Yes

Benefit: You can spend a use of turn undead to make a ray attack (ranged touch attack) that deals 1d6 divine damage/caster level (max 10d6) to a single undead creature within 30 feet. You can spend a use of greater turn undead (per the Sun domain) to deal 2d6 divine damage/caster level (max 20d6) to a single undead creature within 30 feet. The affected undead gets a Will save (DC 10 + cleric level + Charisma modifier) for half damage.

by djrackley

50 Ghost Backstories

by Evil/Insane_Genius and Nimlos

His breath came in short, panicked gasps as he burst through the rotting door and slammed what was left of it shut behind him. A quick glance told him he was in what was once a lady's bedroom, though time and mice had destroyed all but a few vestiges of the simple charm it must have once possessed. Coughing on the dust, he leans against the dirty wall before sliding down to sit on the floor, pulling off long ribbons of discolored wallpaper as he does.

He hadn't wanted to take this job; he had no wish to ever cross paths with a ghost. But Malcolm, a priest with more faith than brains, had talked him into it, him and Tole both. "We've dealt with the undead before," Malcolm had said, sounding so certain. "This can be no different."

But it was different. From the first sight of the crumbling mansion behind walls grown wild with ivy, Roland had felt fear bloom in his heart. Even when they had spent two hours searching the house and found nothing, the fear had never truly subsided. Then they heard it, a few faint notes of music. Footsteps. Fingernails on a windowpane. A flutter of movement in the corner of his vision. They hunted the spirit, but wherever it was, it kept eluding them.

And the house ... the house started to change. Corridors they knew should have lead back to the main hall came instead to dead ends. Doors locked and refused to open. The footsteps returned, so close, and Malcolm convinced them to split up - Roland

and Tole taking one direction, Malcolm the other.

Only a few minutes after Malcolm left, Roland and Tole heard the voice again: "One of three, come walk with me."

The scream that followed was the last they heard of Malcolm.

All thoughts of finishing the job abandoned, the two survivors set their minds to fleeing this hellish place. But the house itself seemed determined to keep them trapped - Roland would swear rooms moved, that hallways lead to different places. For a moment, he actually saw the spirit - a young boy, his head wet and red with blood - walking calmly across the far end of a hallway. Panicking, Roland and Tole decided to get out by any means they could - leaping from a window on what seemed the inescapable third floor was infinitely better than a moment longer in this infernal nightmare.

It was barely a moment later that the floor beneath Tole gave way, dropping the nimble rogue into the darkness below. Not a sound from Tole came from below, only the return of the spirit's voice: "Two of three, come walk with me."

Slowly, Roland levered himself back to his feet, using his terror as fuel to force his exhausted body into action. Through the window, he could see he was still on the third floor, and he could see as well the window was barred. Roland glanced down at the axe in his hand. Using something like this against the spirit seemed hopelessly futile, but there was another task it was perfect for. If the window was impassable, he would make another.

Hefting the weapon with both hands, Roland laid into the wall beside the barred window. Paper, plaster and wood shattered and splintered under each blow. A faint flame of hope kindled in his heart.

Raising the axe for another blow, he shivered in a sudden cold, his breath steaming from his mouth. Frost rimed the windowpanes, surrounding a child's handprint. As surely as he'd ever known anything in his life, Roland knew something was behind him, watching him.

The voice came again, not a whisper, more of a gasping exhale. "Three of three, come walk with me."

The figure on the stairs. The voice in the wind. The phantom footsteps. These are some of the quintessential elements of the ghost and part of what makes it the central player in some of the greatest horror stories.

The presence of ghosts in the folklore of every culture makes them an excellent choice for a Dungeon Master looking for a way to terrify the Player Characters. The players themselves already know plenty about ghosts; unless they've lived their lives under rocks, they've certainly been exposed to a dozen or more ghost stories in their lives. Using the entity in the game allows the DM to tap directly into those experiences, to use what the players themselves know about ghosts to frighten them.

Player will instinctively seek comfort in numbers, in data and stats culled from memory or surreptitiously looked up in the Monster Manual or SRD. However, perhaps more than any other adversary, ghosts invite DMs to break the rules. Every ghost is different; any DM worth his salt should modify the entity beyond simply adding the ghost template to whatever the creature was in life. To that end, the method of the ghost's creation, the backgrounds listed below, should play a major role. The ghost of someone who died by drowning might make the air around it unbreathable. The ghost of someone who died as a sacrifice

might be a walking area of desecration. A very old and insane ghost may have even learned how to make its corner of the ethereal plane appear any way it wants to - such as the home it lived in while alive - and has developed the power to pull the living into its own fantasy world prison. Each ghost should be unique, presenting an unknown adversary to the PCs. If the players are able to mentally reduce it to just a pile of hit points that needs to be dealt, a disservice is done to everyone.

The thing about ghosts is they require a bit more work on the part of the DM to pull off than most other adversaries. Ghosts are not born, they are made - forged in the fire of some terrible tragedy or pulled back from death by some business left unfinished. While a band of orcs might be raiding just because, well, they're orcs, a ghost is something else entirely. It has a single reason for being, a single drive or need that keeps it from wherever its soul should have gone. A good ghost tale is equal parts horror and detective story, as the PCs learn what happened to the person who became the ghost. Just as the ghost's background should figure prominently in the ghost's abilities, so too should it be the underlying theme of the adventure.

The list below is a starting point, a group of ideas DMs can mine for inspiration, the seed of the ghost's background. Beginning with one of these, the DM can (pun intended) flesh out his ghost and his story as he crafts an adventure sure to (pun intended) haunt the players long after the last die is rolled.



1d100/ Backstory

1-2 - Was the village idiot and drowned in a puddle while the villagers laughed at him.
3-4 - Drank poison intended for his father that was administered by his power hungry brother.
4-5 - Fell off a boat while fishing in a nearby lake (or ocean if appropriate).
6-7 - Was pushed down a flight of stairs by her husband who wanted her wealth and property.
8-9 - Murdered by a band of brigands in the forest.
10-11 - Killed and was eaten by a nearby tribe of orcs.
11-12 - An army of soldiers came through her town and raped and murdered her when she went to fetch water from the river.
13-14 - Attacked and killed by a pack of wolves while out fetching firewood from the forest.
15-16 - Healer killed by the military for trying to take care of the wounded enemy as well as allies.
17-18 - A priest killed for trying to provide safety to a group of persecuted gypsies.
19-20 - A madman who was locked away for years in a tiny cell.
21-22 - An adventurer who was crippled by a nearby trap and whose party left him for dead after stealing his possessions.
23-24 - Was executed for a crime he did not commit.
25-26 - Teenager who wasn't allowed to be with the one they loved, so they committed suicide.
27-28 - Eaten by an ogre that attacked their farm.
29-30 - Crushed by a rock from a nearby hill giant fight.
31-32 - Eaten whole by a geographically appropriate monster that has the ability.
33-34 - Stoned for being a heretic by a group of religious zealots.
35-36 - Burned alive for being a witch.
37-38 - Witnessed the murder of an important political figure and was murdered as well to be kept silent...permanently.

39-40 - Wizard miscast his spell and was instantly vaporized by the resulting blast.
41-42 - Was seduced and killed by a succubus.
43-44 - Committed suicide to escape the pressures of life, only to find that they were stuck forever as a ghost.
45-46 - A farmer who died in his sleep, but refuses to stop tilling his farm.
47-48 - Was tricked and killed by a cloaker while in a dungeon.
49-50 - Was killed in a duel to protect the honor of his family's name.
51-52 - Murdered his wife and best friend when he found them together, then committed suicide.
53-54 - A merchant who refuses to leave his shop, even though he was killed by a thief he caught robbing him.
55-56 - A king killed by his scheming adviser for the throne.
57-58 - A prostitute killed for refusing to provide services to a customer.
59-60 - A miner trapped by a cave-in who died after being trapped for several days.
61-62 - A bard killed for not performing well enough for a group of roughnecks.
63-64 - A mother killed in an earthquake that collapsed the roof of her house on herself and her baby.
65-66 - Was the test subject of a new spell created by a wizard. The test did not go well.
67-68 - Was killed by a jealous brother after inheriting his father's land and money.
69-70 - Recently became a ghost because a nearby necromancer raided his grave and used his bones to make a bone golem.
71-72 - Was too slow to get out of the way and trampled to death by a stampede of cattle.
73-74 - Dragon raided his village and was killed by the dragon's breath weapon as it destroyed his house.
75-76 - Lost his way while traveling through a desert and died of thirst and starvation after running out of supplies.
77-78 - Seduced and murdered by fey while traveling through a forest.

79-80 - Killed by treants on the order of a druid after cutting down a tree from a sacred grove (he was not aware of this).
81-82 - Killed when a out of control cart flipped over and crushed her.
83-84 - Summoned a demon to do his bidding, but was unable to control it and was slain for his impudence.
85-86 - Was killed by his partner after robbing a wealthy house of a large gem.
87-88 - Instantly turned into a ghost after picking up a cursed item in a dungeon.
89-90 - Murdered his entire family in a fit of madness, then fell down a flight of stairs after awakening and trying to run away in horror.
91-92 - Killed by a marauding band of goblins and goblin dogs.
93-94 - Committed suicide after failing to protect his king from assassination.
95-96 - Murdered after she was discovered to be a spy from a nearby kingdom.
97-98 - Angered the gods by a particularly blasphemous act, and so was punished by being doomed to wandering forever as a ghost after death.
99-100 - GHOST PIRATES! YAR!



CONSTABLES

WRITTEN BY ROBI ILLUSTRATED BY LADYOFNATS

